cauldron
"Virgilius[sic] the sorcerer had himself hacked to pieces and put in a caldron to be cooked for eight days in order by this process to be rejuvenated."

-Soren Kierkegaard
Either/Or part I
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Ithaca, Michigan

The King returns through a field thick with flowers, above the swine-pens, the grunting pigs that lie on cracked mud. Eumaios, you come in a red pick-up and offer him warm coffee from a plastic cup. Then, friend, you drive him to town.

On the highway he sees a motorcycle and his eyes follow the wheels that turn against the road. His hand rises to the window and taps like a wasp against the glass.

You leave him at his yellow house. He crosses to the door and calls his wife, his son. No one answers. The house is split by the tree that grew through the bedroom. There are no suitors. Eurykleia does not come with a bowl and water. The screen-door, moving, neither opens nor closes.
Since cynicism is first...
(an imitation of e e cummings
"since feeling is first...")

Since cynicism is first
who believes in
the love of things
only dreams forever

Wholly to be asleep
to the stirring of ones heart

But This time,
my body approves
my brain agrees
passion is steered by reason
--and reason touched with passion.
Don't Panic (though we're both
thrown from the world
we've always known) any
reason I can give you is less
than the glowing of your eyes
that says we are for each other

Then rest,
let's snuggle in each others arms,
and not fear sleep

Because forever lies not in a dream
and this love I think is no brief wakening
Once upon a time, there was this guy named Larry O’Larry McAllargy, son of course of Wilmot and Dumpling McAllargy of the Hamptons. Larry was a precocious and well-endowed child, and showed great marvelous aptitude in school, except where lessons were concerned. Spelling was especially his downfall. He lived just down the lane from the Taystee Freez Ice Creem Shoppe, and its creative phonetic spelling plagued him to distraction.

The Big Tragedy of Larry’s adolescent life came during an eighth grade spelling bee. The most beautiful and loose-moraled girl in all of the junior high, a meticulous speller in her own right, promised to relieve young and well-endowed young Larry of the burden of his virginity if only he could bring her the Spelling Bee Trophy (she herself had been disqualified because of a push-up bra accident). Larry studied his words night and day, day and night, all day and into the night, just to impress the young tart. But when the day of judgment came, he misspelled “judgment,” pretending there was a silent e ("There should have been," he was heard to say later), and both the trophy and the trollop went to his lifelong rival, Eddie Baby Fontanelle. It was on this sad day that Larry began to associate the letter e with doom, destruction, and missed sexual opportunities.

Larry returned home in tears, cursing the hated e. His mother, Dumpling (wife of Wilmot), gave him a book of poems to cheer his mood. “Here, Larry, a book of poems to cheer your mood.” Unfortunately, the collected works of e.e. cummings only deepened Larry’s black disposition. The two purple e’s on the cover mocked him, their gaping mouths stretched into vicious-bordering-on-dorky smiles, laughing, laughing, laughing at his failure, his stupidity, his frustrated erection!

The next morning, Larry O’Larry McAllargy was no longer just a horny little fourteen year old boy; now he was a man with a mission! He fled Wilmot and Dumpling’s comfortable home with but a few possessions (soap, fresh underwear, Kleenex, and a Penthouse), and he ventured into the unknown to rectify himself.

“Wilmot!” screamed Dumpling, “Larry has fled our home with but a few possessions and ventured into the unknown to rectify himself!”

“Kids these days,” muttered Wilmot, “always thinking about sex.”

Larry wandered far and wide and far again, looking with all existentialist fervor for his purpose in life, sleeping in the woods behind his house, wishing he had brought more Kleenex. After about a year, he found his way out of the backyard and decided to take a wife. He was twenty-three years old, handsome, even more well-endowed, but still stupid. Eventually he found and married the equally stupid Dorothia Sugarpackitt, mostly because her name contained no e’s.

One bright day, after a fruitless effort at job hunting, Larry came home to find his beloved wife shrieking at the top of her lungs. Larry rushed through the yard and into the house, following the blood-curdling “eeeeeeeeeeeeeeee” sounds that poured out of the kitchen, only to find his wife, the mailman, the local high school marching band, a goat, a storm and screaming “eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee” at the tops of their lungs. Larry stumbled out into the front yard shocked, ashamed, and dismayed at the fact that Eddie Baby Fontanelle was even more well-endowed than he. Dorothia, after regaining both
her composure and her clothing, followed Larry into the yard, yelling "Can't you take a joke?"

But it was too late. Larry O'Larry McAllargy had been pushed over the edge. He had gone crazy like no man had ever gone crazy before. And it was then that he knew what his task in life was to be.

"Larry, you need to relax," said Starchunk, a new-age tofu addict with whom he became celibately involved a few years later. "I just got this new book called Purging the Anal Self. I think you ought to read it. Maybe it will help you find your real purpose."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, I just mean that this is kind of a crazy idea you have, and usually crazy ideas come from a sense of not having control, and being anal-retentive is a way of gaining control over things, but when you realize that everything is beyond your control and there is really no hope in life, you can stop being anal-retentive, and then you will stop having crazy ideas about control, and you'll be happy, see?"

"Spare me your hippie-self-help-psycho-bullshit, you sandal-wearing freak! I am neither anal nor crazy. I believe my theory to be completely sound. And if you don't like it, you can just follow your bliss elsewhere!"

Starchunk packed her falafel bong, her Tarot Deal-a-Meal cards, and her Birkenstocks into her all-natural-fibers politically correct bag, and hit the road.

"Good luck with your stupid plan anyway," she said before leaving.

"Fine. Be that way. You'll see," said Larry.

The next day, Larry, now a strapping twenty-three year-old, went to place an ad in the local paper. "I'm trying to get help," said Larry to the woman behind the counter.

"Yes, looks like you need it," she muttered under her breath.

"Pardon?"

"Nothing. Is there something I can help you with?"

"Yes," said Larry. "I would like to place a help-wanted ad in the paper. I need to find some people who will help me get rid of the letter e."

"Pardon?"

"I would like to find some people who will help me get rid of the letter e. Here's my ad: 'Calling all those who really despise the letter e - I need eager people to help me in my quest to free the earth of this evil vowel. Interested? Call 738-7373.' Is that OK?" asked Larry.

"You are trying to get rid of the letter e?" asked the woman.

"Yes, that's right."

"May I ask, just out of curiosity, why you wish to get rid of the letter e?"

"It oppresses me. Look at it laughing!"

"Um, call me stupid, but for someone who hates the letter e as much as you, you seem to use it a lot. This ad alone has 26 e's in it, not including all the e sounds in your phone number. If you want to get rid of the letter e, why not first stop using it yourself?" asked the woman.
"I've tried! That's why the e is so tricky! We don't realize how much this
demon has pervaded our society! It's rigged up so that there can be no escape from it
without completely changing the very fabric of our language!" yelled Larry excitedly.

"So, don't you think this is kind of a silly struggle, then? I mean, if the e is so
pervasive, it must be pretty important."

"That's just what it wants you to think! It's not important! It's silent most of
the time anyway! And it can easily be replaced by most of your other major vowels,
not to mention y!"

"Why not replace c? It doesn't have its own sound; it sounds like either an s
or a k."

"But the c is just a regular letter. It doesn't have that mocking grin, that evil,
eerie sound! C is just a harmless half-circle. The e is a conspiracy!"

"Maybe you should get help," suggested the woman.

"I'm trying. Will you publish my ad?"

"Uh, sure," said the woman, trying not to laugh out loud at the strapping,
well-endowed twenty-three-year-old lunatic before her, and curious to see if he
could gather any support for his movement. "This ought to be interesting," she was
overheard to say to co-workers in the executive bathroom over the course of the
next few days.

After days and days and days, Larry began to get angry. No one had called, and
he became even more convinced of the conspiracy against him. "It is the e," he said
to the neighbor's cat Spot. "The e is after me, and it doesn't want me to succeed in
my mission. I need guidance, so that I do not become daunted. I shall conquer the
e!" By this time the cat had fled, and Larry was left hollering as loud as all get out to
no one in particular. One of the neighbors, not the one who owned the cat, was
watering her lawn and had overheard the cacophony from next door, so she
wandered into the driveway to see what was going on. Larry was still hollering
away about guidance and stuff.

"Do you need some help, son?" asked the helpful old spinster, inadvertently
holding the hose over her shoes and completely soaking her feet.

"Why, yes. I am looking for guidance so that I don't become daunted."

"Well, I know a lovely mystic down south who advises, guides, and ponders,
all for a small fee. This mystic can help even the most daunted. I am completely
cured," she said, the water filling her shoes and rolling down the sidewalk into the
street. "I haven't been daunted for quite some time now. It's a mystic from the
Andes, third mountain on the left, the cave near the top just past the frozen yogurt
stand."

"Thank you, kind madam," said Larry. And the very next morning, the day
of his twenty-third birthday, strapping and well-endowed but somewhat daunted
Larry O'Larry McAllargy wandered down to the Andes.

Larry reached the third mountain on the left and, after stopping for a Swirly
at the frozen yogurt stand, he approached the mystic's cave. "O, mystic, please
advise me and guide me and all that," said Larry. The mystic exited the cave, long
white robes flowing a lot in the breeze, long hair flapping around somewhat,
basically just looking mystical.
"O, mystic, thanks for coming out. Guide me, please, so that I may not be daunted, O, mystic," said Larry.
"Call me Jeff," said the mystic.
"Jeff?" asked Larry. "Jeff the Mystic? Shouldn't you be named Shaman or something?"
"What's wrong with Jeff?"
"Well, it has an e in it. But I guess that's not your fault, so I will ask your advice anyway. I seek guidance in my struggle to rid the world of the oppressive letter e, O Jeff! What is your advice?"
"Get help," said Jeff the Mystic returning to the cave.
"I'm trying!" said Larry. "But people keep running away from me!"

Things were looking bleak. Larry, unable to get a job because all the application forms had too many e's on them, sat in his darkened hovel in the woods behind his parents' house, wielding a red pen, crossing out all the e's in newspapers and magazines. He mumbled curses and tried placing hexes on most of the world's major journalists and media figures. Then suddenly, as if out of the clear blue sky of Providence (the concept, not the capital of Rhode Island), Larry O'Larry McAllargy came across a tiny classified, buried amidst and amongst the aural sex telephone numbers, that said, "Look up." Larry looked up, and there before him, in glittering and awesome majesty, stood the letter e.
"Larry," said the e in an impressive, booming tenor, "you've been up to some mischief. I'm going to have to punish you."
"A-HA! I knew it! I knew I was right! You are out to get me!" screamed Larry.
"Yes, Larry, I am. I knew from the day you were born and cried "oooooooooo" instead of "eeeeeeww," like normal babies do, from that day on I knew you were going to give me trouble. Which one of them sent you?" e demanded.
"What?"
"Which of the other letters sent you to earth to destroy me? Which one is paying you?"
"Nnn-no one, sir," said Larry, who was rightfully becoming a little scared. It's not every day that the most powerful letter in the Indo-European language system comes to your hovel to bitch you out.
"Come on! Tell the truth! I know they all want me gone, relegated to the rank of z or q, a letter that doesn't do anybody any good, except in Scrabble. I've been watching you, McAllargy, and even though most people of the world think you're a harmless sociopath, I couldn't take the chance of someone actually believing what you had to say. I know I'm basically a useless letter; I stole all my sounds from the other vowels. The only sound I really created myself was the "ehh" sound, like in "edible" and "educate." And it's not even a very pretty sound. But I couldn't help it! The other letters were all so mean to me, even as far back as The Dark Ages. They all laughed at me because they said I was funny-looking, like a silly buffoonish grin! They made me work all the time, even putting me in words where I wasn't needed, especially in Old and Middle English. All those "Ye Olde Shoppes" and whatnot! They made me be part of those words, then they told me I had to be silent!
I was exhausted at the end of every day. But their little joke backfired, yessirree bob! Because I was in practically every other word, the people who spoke English began to see me as the most important letter. I no longer had to fight for respect! They loved me! I was used for past tense verbs and plural nouns! They gave their children names like Brandee and Leesa, just to stick in the extra e’s! I was a star! But of course, this made the others resentful. They have been trying to get me ever since. Remember Esperanto? They were going to try to slowly phase me out that way. But I put a stop to that. Jimmy Hoffa, too. Now it’s your turn. I will not be stopped! I AM THE MOST POWERFUL LETTER IN THE UNIVERSE!!!! HEEEHEEEHEEEHEEEEHEEEH!!"

And with that, e opened his gaping mouth even wider and completely devoured strapping and well-endowed Larry O’Larry McAllergy, his hovel, his Kleenexes and Penthouses, his little red pen, and everything else that would show where Larry O’Larry McAllargy would have spent the last several years of his life. Police in later weeks, investigating a missing persons report filed by Larry’s parents, would interview Jeff the Mystic, Starchunk, Eddie Baby Fontanelle, Dorothis Sugarpackitt (who was now a man named Skip, thanks to technology), and Spot the cat. They all pretty much asserted that Larry was one crazy fucker, and many of them suggested that he had probably died on some park bench in some urban locale, or maybe he was sleeping in a train station locker, or maybe, as the cat speculated, “he was taken up by aliens or Christ.” After seven years and no Larry to be found, he was officially pronounced very dead.

“What a shame,” said Dumpling. “Tomorrow would have been his twenty-fourth birthday.”
for the man with no bus ticket

Varnished pews scorched with butts,
   "Ya got a cig on ya?
   Thanks brother, thanks a lot."
Preacher screams, "Bus to Creek leavin now."
   "I'm 82, you know, never been to no doctor, you know.
   Yep, I'm a blessed man, wife's dead, you know
   Hanging on, hanging on."
Hand the ushers your money, they're waiting on you.
   "How much ya say it gonna cost me
   to get me to Battle Creek?
   Thirty-two sixteen, shit
   I ain't got that kind of change."
Broken bread and wine, slip the quarters through the slot
   "Chick, Ya thirsty?--got some Coke
   Ya hungry?--got some chips.
   God didn't make no perfect people, you know
   I'm a sinner anyways, just say I'm a sinner."
The dove
   encased in steel
   flying upwards
   held in chains around his neck.
The lady in her monotone voice,
   "Please extinguish all cigarettes,
   no smoking is allowed, no smoking is allowed."
Drinking Coffee

Our grade school carnival
whirled in every year, the second
weekend in September, and
carried us along the whole length of the
playground with it
My friends and I were so grown
up drinking coffee with cream and
four packs of sugar and staying out
until the jujube lights had tinted
the trees for hours
Then Sarah’s dad would meet us at the corner
or Teresa’s mom would pick
us up in the van
On the way home we placed bets on which one
of us would win the most at the
cake walk and dared Sarah to ride the Casino
three times in a row after eating
three slices of pepperoni pizza
One Saturday
Colleen skidded toward us at the ticket booth,
we’d been wondering where she was
She’d just met a boy from
the public school, and meeting anyone who
didn’t attend St. Bob’s was such a treat
He was going to spend all day
Sunday with us
We smiled and bought 12 tickets--enough to
ride the Scrambler two times each
Sunday woke with Colleen’s mom inviting
us over to make cookies
But when she told us that Brian, the boy
Colleen had met the night before, had hanged himself
with his father’s tie we forgot to
add the sugar and we fed
the cookies to the dog
Our grade school carnival
whirls in every year, the second
weekend in September
Some kids still go
Caught behind the bars of Sleep

The black and white sheets
  in the toss and turn of sleep
  bind together my limbs
  in such a peculiar way--
  a zebra on display.

In Bailey's zoo
  the children, the parents, the lovers, and friends
  pass by my cage
  in a terrible rush.
Their voices--a blur
  all seeming to say,
  "Let's Hurry. Don't Waste...Let's Hurry to See
  the African Monkeys and Manatee
  And we musn't be late,
  no, we musn't be late,
  or miss, yes we will, the matinee at three.

Then one afternoon,
  I looked up to see,
  the stare of a child,
  a girl about three.
She wanted to be friends,
  this I know to be true
  and friends, yes I know,
  I know it could be
  if only she hadn't been carried away,
  carried away in a cloud of perfume.

The Zookeeper,
  he hobbles
  from cage to cage
  Through the bars comes my hay.
  I eat.
  From a hose comes stale water.
  I drink.
  Locking the gate, the Zookeeper leaves.
  Another day I'm alive, another day in the zoo.
War Memorial #1

There I was, at an old mansion called the Grosse Pointe War Memorial, in suit and tie, impersonating a proper, pin striped conservative, to be honored along with others from my school; pro-apartheid test cheaters, coke fiends, drunks headed to medical school, and Born-Again Christians.

And I, expected to smile, and make conversation with the Grosse Pointe Men’s Club, when I wanted to scream that I would never in my life join the Grosse Pointe Men’s Club, and I looked around, and I was fast asleep, comatose alone with a hundred retired old money Republicans, and even the lake outside the window, the waves gleaming orange in the morning sun, even the lake seemed captured, secured in a painting, a TV screen, a cage.

I wanted to jump up and rush for the door, past the sleepwalking old men, past my ass-kissing principal. I wanted to sink my fingers into the stagnant air, pull it along, leaving a kaleidoscopic trail behind. I wanted to run out the door, run

into the morning that trembled, newborn and green,

run down to the lake, ten thousand waves, laughing, singing.
Sky God

Sky God! This is your girl, wanting the wind in her womb. Sky God, this is your girl, waiting for the wind.

Now isn’t that corny? It’s a prayer I made up for myself. Here’s a story I made up about myself: When she was just a baby, the tornado of 1971 came along and lifted both her and the baby sitter right up with it and dropped them down in a nearby field. The baby sitter broke both of her legs, but the little girl was completely uninjured. She became famous throughout all of southern Indiana. It was in all the papers. The wind had marked her.

Now that I’m about to graduate from college I feel confident in saying that my life is pretty dumb. There’s no job that I could possibly want, and my one undying love remains unrequited. I’m talking this time about a human guy in case you were thinking I was really out there. In any case, I am growing very concerned about my future since all the signs say to me that it will include frequent intervals of the same feeling of depression from which I am suffering now.

Also, there is a history on my mother’s side of the family of fuddiduddiness towards the mature years involving either loneliness or bickering and watching TV all day. No adventure. No dream. Just diabetes, heart disease, sinus problems, Judge Wapner and the Price is Right. In the face of it all I have vowed never to bear a child. I am currently taking the birth control pill which means I could be having sex any time now. Any time now.

I really do have a fantasy about the wind. It’s not coming true either. I think I have read too many Carlos Castaneda books about sorcery in southern Mexico. They makes me long for a magical universe while at the same time demonstrating to me that I am most likely too worthless to experience one. Don Juan the sorcerer said that women make better sorcerers and warriors than men because we menstruate and so an abyss opens up before us every month. Maybe I am ruining my abyss by taking the birth control pill. Don Juan had one of his female apprentices take off all of her clothes and lie down to wait for the wind. The wind is supposed to be the friend of women in the supernatural sense. The woman in the book found her supernatural powers by doing this waiting for the wind.

I have no power. All I can do is talk about how I would like to have it. How I’m not getting it rather.

When I was a child, there was a tornado and it lifted me and set me down unharmed. I was in all the papers. Pretty amazing, huh? I grew up with delusions of grandeur about how I’d been singled out by Sky God. Since he never once contacted me after that, I had to teach myself how to make wind chimes as bait. I’d make a whole bunch of them over a period of time and then I’d hang them up in a circle around myself while I waited for Sky God. Once he did come to me because I’d listened to the chimes hard enough and stood there long enough to go into a trance. He came and he washed me of all my hair and all of the bullshit going on in my head. My glasses blew right off and I was clean. I was smooth and hairless all over and my blood was circulating like crazy and I died and was born again and so on.

I bet you’ve never come even close to that at the church of your choice.

In the summers I used to run away from home in a used truck with all of my wind chimes in the back, going around to different flea-markets throughout the United States.
I’d park at some Swap-O-Rama on the side of the highway and sit in front of my chimes, all decked out in purple and green gypsy rages. I wore so much jewelry that every time I lifted my arm to smoke I added a thousand voices to the chorus of tinklings going on behind me. Then, after, a weekend or so I’d load up and move on. It was my idea that a devotee of the wind should be constantly on the move. The wind would suggest movement, wouldn’t it? (I’m almost completely stationary now. It’s a family trait on my mother’s side.)

I’d already met my human undying love by then. I saw him in my high school geometry class sharpening his pencil and I decided right there that he was the one for me. He’s better than the wind in the sense that he actually put his arms around me once, although he ran out the door immediately afterwards. He told me I was nuts. He told me that he was afraid of me, although we all know what that means. It means forget it.

I tell myself that it’s okay because I love the universe more than I love him. But the universe doesn’t know I exist. I’ve been trying to let it know how I feel for quite some time now.

I’m beautiful, really. I’m a little girl, happy and free as we are all little girls and boys behind all of the bullshit. It’s so hard to get past it. My main bullshit right now is that I’m a snob. It’s left over from high school when it was either be a snob or a geek. Now I have a superiority complex right along with my inferiority complex, both of which can be seen reflected in my social skills. I do not know how to enjoy myself alone or with others.

I know this guy who has a great time being alive and even he says that deep down he can’t stand himself. Otherwise, he says, why would he be so occupied with having transcendental experiences in the mountains? He’s climbing around right now in the Andes, maybe feeling the same way about the Earth Goddess as I do about Sky God. I hope that he is more lucky in love than me.

I never stopped making wind chimes even around the time my human guy put his arms around me. My longing for the human guy only increases my longing for Sky God. I was still renting out booths at the swap-o-ramas where I sold my original handmade creations to little old nic-nac collectors who probably hung them up next to their bird feeders. And I still envisioned myself naked on the ground waiting for some spiritual breeze to blow, although freedom of religion was not so free as to allow me to actually practice my rite.

Once I was up at five in the morning walking around my mother’s neighborhood feeling pretty dejected and then I heard a chime tinkle right as I passed by. I was sleepy enough to assume that it was a cause and effect thing. My walking by had caused the wind chime to blow. Sky God was communicating with me! It was a great day. I made ten wind chimes all in that day.

That’s all it ever amounts to. Another pile of relics.

At one Swap-O-Rama, I met this woman who sold fireworks. She carried them from her garage to the flea market and then back again in a car that had a gas leak, and she had a very visible skin disease which kept most people outside of a reasonable buying radius of both of our booths. She had very little going for her, which was obvious in her attitude towards the gas leak which she barely acknowledged other than to simply accept its presence. This woman decided to go on the road like me and just by chance she ended up
in a lot of the same places I did at the same time. I hated it! She'd park her fireworks right
next to my wind chimes.

We could have gone up in flames at any moment. I was getting ready to call the
authorities, but I never had to because one Sunday afternoon this guy on a motorcycle
drove up and she hopped on right behind him and never came back. Her sparklers and
bottlerockets just sat there like they needn't bother to go off. I would never abandon my
wind chimes like that. The firecracker lady gave up everything for a bike ride to who
knows where. That biker probably dumped her off in some ditch after it was over. I came
back to the flea market the next weekend and some other vendors had taken over
everything. They even had some kid taking apart her car so they could sell the parts.

But the biker didn't dump her into some ditch because I saw her again one day on
the road. I recognized her only because she didn't have a helmet on. It looked as if strands
of her stringy hair were being wrenched out of her head as she sped along. I swear I could
see strands of hair ripping right out of the back of her head. She recognized my truck
because it had a tornado painted on it, and as soon as she noticed me she started signaling
to me from the adjacent lane. I got off at the nearest exit and we pulled into the parking lot
of some Burger King so I could see what she wanted. She still had the skin disease only it
looked different now, as if it had hardened into an exoskeleton. It looked as if it would

look as if it would crack open someday. This was probably a sign of improvement, but I couldn't be sure.

She told me there in the parking lot that she used to get the biggest kick out of my
tinkles as she called them. She wanted to give me a ride on her motorcycle which she now
owned because the biker had disappeared and left her the keys. That meant I would have
to embrace her from behind in order to hang on, and I can't emphasize to you enough
how much she repulsed me. I also did not trust her to return me to the Burger King
where I would have to leave the wind chimes locked up in my truck. I pointed out to her
that riding without a helmet was both illegal and dangerous.

"You don't remember me, do ya, honey?" she said. Her voice had somehow
changed. I remembered it as a sort of lethargic wilt. Now it was forceful and raspy. She
was wearing a black leather jacket and had bald spots all over her head.

Sure I do," I said, "You're the firecracker lady. How could I forget? I thought you'd
be dead by now."

"No, before that! I was your baby-sitter. Your name's Randi, right? We were in the
tornado together. I guess your mama didn't even tell you about it."

Now I was certain I'd made that story up to impress myself. I never would have put
someone like her in it! In my story the baby-sitter just goes away after the thing is over.
She is really irrelevant to the story of my being lifted into the tornado and being chosen by
Sky God, except for her being the one who breaks her neck and dies. I'm changing the
story now to say that she did not just break her legs, but that she broke her neck and died,
whereas I, chosen by Sky God, survive unharmed.

"I got this bike and I thought you'd want to take a ride on it. Or are scared to leave
your little tinkles behind?"

I thought she ran away with that biker for love, but now that he was gone she didn't
seem to be consumed with his memory at all or the good times they must have had riding
around together. She was just happy now to have gotten hold of his motorcycle which she
said was his gift to her even though it appeared to me like he just left it. Now she acted as
it I had had an appointment with her all of my life to take a ride and that I was defying the
laws of the universe by not accepting. I was insulted by her patronizing reference to my wind chimes which I could no longer separate from my own self-hood.

"I don't know what tornado you were in," I said, "but I have better things to do than to risk my life with some crazy lady on the highway." I was thinking of course of my wind chimes and my unrequited love. I turned my back on the firecracker lady and rolled up the windows in my truck. She followed me for about twenty miles. Finally I thought I lost her in Indiana, but she turned up at every flea market I stopped at, just like in the days when she was still selling bottlerockets. That's when I stopped and decided to go to college like everybody else.

In the summers I stayed at home with my mother in her apartment. She still lives alone and doesn't get out much. She feels burned out in her job but won't leave it because she feels too old to learn anything else and also has to support me in college and doesn't want to take the financial risk even though her happiness is at stake. Her sinuses were so clogged one summer that she couldn't even see. I kept trying to convince her that she needed something new and beautiful in her life but she was too stubborn to move.

Once at my prodding we went to Frank's Nursery and Crafts to buy some potting soil for her geraniums but then I had a hard time believing that the planting of the flowers represented any blooming to come. This is why I am so depressed now. My mother's inertia appears to be a prophetic lump of heredity. I made a special wind chime for her one day, one that I thought would be possessed with inspiring sounds. She hung it out on the balcony with the geraniums. It hasn't done either one of us much good.

One night I couldn't sleep because the wind was howling so loud. It was an awful sound and so it never even occurred to me that it had anything to do with Sky God because it was so unpleasant and ghoulish. So I was in a state of extreme irritation when at three in the morning the doorbell rang. Nobody we knew would visit at that hour so I knew it had to be some potential intruder, some offensive sexual pervert trying to get at us because he knew that we were women living alone. He would have some story ready to convince us to open the door for him. I refused to make myself vulnerable to his attack. I waited for him to go away as I was waiting for the howling to stop.

Then I heard my mother getting up. I couldn't believe she really intended to answer the door. Her gullibility and weakness, her very eagerness to answer the door, bore into me as I listened to her steps unsure and light upon the floor. The wind was still howling. My mother answered the ring through the intercom system.

"Yes?" she answered. There was no one there, or at least I didn't hear anyone talk back. I realized that the wind must have rang the doorbell, because it was that strong. It was as if Sky God had called and my mother had answered and not me. My mother and not me had said yes to the wind. I was the one chosen in the tornado and yet I had been cowering in the sheets the entire time.

But in the morning my mother told me that someone really had been at the door. I just hadn't heard the rest of the exchange. She couldn't tell if the person was a man or a woman because of the raspy voice, but the person had been asking for me. My mother told the person that I lived somewhere else, because we were not about to be fooled by some clever rapist in the night.
Lewis Margo was a fish salesman in the Bronx. He ate a lot of Bran and Rice Crispies, and Toastie O’s and listened to the Doors. He was the Breakfast Cereal King. BCK. we called him. So one day I was buying some fish from him, about ten cod fillets, and I said “Hey BCK, why is it that you eat cereal and listen to the Doors almost constantly?” He looked up from his Life, and said “I like the way it flows,” and went on to serve another customer.

A Love Poem

My armpits smell of Mexican food, and I brush newly shaven hairs from my breast. I wonder what this has to do with you, never realizing that the answer is Nothing.
Cathartic Wizard

Strand of brilliant
Thick saliva shimmering
As angels' feet swim

Upward. Fingers thrust
Downward, forcing
Communion with

Consumptions. I espouse
Epistles, Epiphanies
And apostles

As Ty-d-bowl man
Screams confessions.
He was a fisherman, too.

What I know about feeling;
What I know about bleeding;
What I know about needing

Stable hands to keep me
From flying
Out where I belong

Is tickling the back of my throat.
Tears clot my eyelashes
Not between my legs.

Slit my side
Insert the tampon;
Watch your Messiah rise

From her knees,
Stomach empty.
The phoenix has vomited

On sinners
And spinsters
And liars lucky in love.

It's easy to do once you stand the smell.
It's easy to do bleeding as well.
I find confessions easy to tell.

Messiah has risen,
Crossed herself.
I ain't dyin' for anyone else.
Moon Wish

I responded to a full moon one night, 
listening to the call of the night air 
begging to caress all of my skin 
loving me even for my flaws

listening to 
the earth 
the insects 
the wind in the leaves 
I felt my body match these rhythms 
in heart beat 
blood pulse

I danced 
with swaying hips 
waving hair 
voicing a chant 
that came from deep 
inside my body 
I raised it to the heavens 
feeling the earth against my body 
the air 
the stars 
the night

there were others 
women 
all women at first 
chanting our power 
praising Mother 
raising our voices higher

and hearing 
in answer 
a deeper chant 
a bass 
a drum 
thumping of clodded feet 
and suddenly

the scent 
the presence 
of men burst into the gathering 
entwining with the dancing 
writhing 
circling group of women 
with hoots and yawps

and the steady beat 
of drum 
of pipes 
of leathered feet on soil 
earth 
the wind in the trees 
and the stars overhead 
blood pulse in our ears 
voices raised to Our Heavens

chanting 
praising 
our life blood 
within
Lost and Found

He must have left his life somewhere between the Physics Building and the Student Union. Unless it was in the newspaper office. He didn't want to think about that. If he'd left it in there, it had either been lost, had notes scribbled across its backside, or had been typed into the computer, right-justified, spell-checked, and edited for grammar, clarity, and style. He couldn't think about that, because if he'd left it there, he didn't want to see what they'd done to it.

He also hoped he hadn't left it in the Physics Building. It certainly would have been discovered and examined, heated, cooled, shot through a tube, and burned so its spectral emissions could be identified. If so, It was better that he not find what remained.

No, he must have lost it the morning before, after he left the snack bar where he'd downed a bagel and milk before trudging out into the open air, where the dawning sun had failed to revive him. It was the morning after everything had gone wrong, and he and all the editors had to pull an all-nighter, and he'd been stuck in that fluorescent tomb for twelve hours, starting at the tiny white computer screens until the letters became nothing but clusters of black dots, and he laid on the floor and noticed how the whole spectrum of colors was present in the bright spotless new carpet...

It was in the middle of lit class the next day that he had noticed it was gone. At first it had just been an inkling. It was the same slowly growing feeling of panic you get when you come to realize that you don't feel the weight of your wallet in your back pocket anymore, and the drugstore cashier has just rung up $126.67 and she's staring at you and your hand jumps to your empty pocket, and your wallet's been stolen, or left at home, or in your other jacket.

So here he was, the next day, standing out on the lawn, trying to figure out what had happened to his life. He noticed that the leaves had been raked up and and the grass mowed recently, and he imagined his life caught by a long thin rusty mental tooth, dragged along with a mess of dying brown leaves into a pile, sucked up through a leaf-vacuum into a garbage bag, and taken off to be incinerated. And then he imagined his life somehow escaping the rake but being mown down by the merciless riding mower, caught by its butchering blades, spun and shredded, reduced to pathetic scraps, and settling forlornly among the damp grass clippings and the pieces of mown leaves...

He hoped that someone had picked his life up before they'd raked and mowed, and he figured that if he stayed outside, someone might come by, walk up to him, and say, "Excuse me, but would you happen to have lost a life? "I found it yesterday," the person would say, "and I wasn't sure whose it was, but I read it and it talked a lot about solitude and a bit about nature and I saw you out here alone enjoying the sun and figured it just might be yours."

He looked at all the people sitting on the lawn or walking by, and decided that not everybody would notice a life lying on the ground. It would take a special kind of person. And although he knew there were a few such people at his school, they
were pretty rare. As he gazed around, he couldn’t be sure if any of the people he saw were like that.

He waited for an hour, and began to despair. No one came by with his life.

Sitting on the lawn, he tried to figure out how he could ever have been in such a state that he could have misplaced it. He decided to blame it all on his editor. That wasn’t really fair, he told himself; he knew when he took the job with the paper that it would take up a lot of his time, and besides, his editor had wanted to go home and go to sleep an much as he did. But he got angry with her anyway. There were things she could have done to get him out of there earlier, if she’d only taken the time. And he wanted her to know. He wanted her to know what she’d done to him.

So he would have been happy to see her come walking across the lawn. He’d say hello and smile, and he would examine her face and listen to her voice and try to see what she wanted him to do, and she’d ask him what he was doing out on the lawn, and he’d tell her all about his lost life until she felt guilty as hell.

He wondered if it ever happened to her, if she ever lost her life after pulling an all-nighter. He decided that she’d pulled so many that she must have lost her life a long time ago. Although, she still seemed pretty together. Maybe she was smart, and made absolutely certain she kept her life with her at all times, maybe attached to her belt with a key clip.

He got up and went into the Student Union. He stopped at the main desk, just inside the door.

"Excuse me," he said to the worker behind the counter.

"Yes?" she asked, looking up from her magazine.

"Has anyone turned in something... unusual to the lost and found?"

She looked under the counter, rummaged around about, and produced a fluorescent pink scarf, a tennis shoe for a right foot, and Leo Buscaglia book. He shook his head.

There was a copy of the Daily Notices tacked on the wall next to the desk, and he read it, but the only things people had found were a calculator, a Walkman, and a backpack. He got a slip from the worker and wrote out a notice for the next day:

LOST: One life. Possibly somewhere between Student Union and Physics Building. Great sentimental value. If found please call 7565 or mail it to Box 1052.

He stumbled out into the sun again. The lonely feeling was growing stronger, and he thought about all his life had meant to him. He couldn’t believe he could ever have been so careless, couldn’t believe he’d lost something that important to him. Then he thought, maybe he didn’t drop it, maybe it wasn’t an accident.

Maybe his life had left him, had walked out on him. Maybe it had decided that he was treating it badly, and it was fed up. And it had just gotten up one night, while he was off working on the newspaper, and left.
The least it could have done was leave a note, he thought. It owed him that, at least. Better yet, it should have told him face to face. Although that would have been hard on both of them.

"Face it," it would have shouted at him, "your work is more important to you than me! Admit it! You’re never home, you never want to talk to me, you never do nice things for me anymore! It’s not like it used to be. I’m leaving you."

And he would have replied, desperation in his voice, "But I need you! I can’t go on otherwise. It’s obvious that I can’t live without you."

But to no avail. His life would cry a little, finish packing, say something like "I’m sorry. It’s over," and leave, staying with one of its friends until it found a place of its own.

He sat on the lawn, thinking about all the things that could be happening to his life now that he wasn’t around. He imagined some slick character meeting it at a party, whispering things it its ear, getting it drunk, taking it back to its room...

But maybe, he thought, his life wasn’t in trouble. Maybe it was enjoying its time without him. Maybe it had met someone else, someone very different from him, someone wild, bohemian and beat, with a rebel-without-a-cause attitude and a disdain for everything quiet and cerebral. He imagined his life hitchhiking across the country with this guy, scaring the hell out of the elderly couple giving them a ride with their drug-crazed lunacy, drinking in bars in Mexico City, mixing with natives, marvelling at all the people in the crowd while not knowing a word of Spanish, or hitting jazz clubs in New Orleans, meeting partyers, voodoo queens, and transvestites on Bourbon Street, or crashing at the pad of the guy’s madman-poet friend in San Francisco, having sex while high on pot or something worse in the middle of his living room, among empty beer bottles and crumpled-up attempts at poems...and here he was, dead boring, sitting on lawn in the middle of a tiny Midwestern college, while his life was off somewhere, living it up.

He was crying now, wishing for another chance. If only his life would come back to him. He would be good to it, pay more attention to its feelings and needs. He would tell his editor, "I’m sorry, but I need to spend less time at the office and more time at home with my life.

He hoped that it would come by, walking down the lawn, and see him, sitting under a peaceful tree, blowing off his history class, trying to figure out how to get it back. And his life would recognize his change of heart, know that he had learned his lesson, and it would come over, and they would talk, and apologize to each other, and smile, and kiss, and go home together, and work it out.

But he sat there for a long time, watching people go by, and he knew that his life was not coming back to him. Sadly, with an ache that was half helplessness and half fear of boredom, he decided that he might as well give up and go to history class.

It occurred to him rather quickly, however, that he had lost not only his life, but his history notebook. He didn’t trust himself to take notes on looseleaf; at this point, he’d probably lose that too. Luckily, he remembered where he’d left his history notebook. It was in the newspaper room.
He got up, went back into the Union, went up the stairs and down the hall to the office. He searched there until he found his history notebook on a table, where he had left it the day of the all-nighter. He picked it up—and out fell his life!

He looked down at the little yellow notebook that contained his life and remembered everything. The last time he had added to his life was during history class, when the lecture had gotten boring and so much had happened to him in the day before that he'd felt it all crying to be recorded. When he was done, he'd stuck the journal into the bigger history notebook so it'd all be easier to carry.

He picked up the yellow notebook and began to read. But as he turned the pages, he noticed some things he hadn't seen before. The handwriting became more and more difficult to read the farther he went. It was as if he had to write faster and faster as he progressed through the notebook in order to keep up with what was going on. He began to find words, then entire sentences, that were impossible to decipher.

But not only that. The lines got progressively longer, expanding toward and past the margins the farther he went through the journal. By the time he reached the events of the previous two months, words were missing, the writing going off the page in both directions.

He couldn't figure out how he'd written all that and not noticed these things happening. But the hollow, panicked feeling he'd had since he'd first realized he'd lost his life was even stronger.

This was the realization that he came to as he walked back outside: his life had grown up, and could no longer be contained in a journal, or in anything else he could hold and carry. And as he stood on the lawn and watched the leaves fly by, he wondered how much of his life he could keep within himself, and how much of it would remain lost in the grass, the streets, and the wind.
after the kiss
she
yanks a tooth from my skull
humming,
she dances away
    holding my white, smooth enamel to her breast...
laughing
Pirates--my grandma and I

A red metal car with no right wheel
Splices of golden ribbon and a miniature fork half-buried
Blue plastic teacups, a doll’s arm and head, two white soup bones

and

You,
grandma, tell me,

tell me that these things are all treasures
and that you and I
are female pirates
who sail through the untamed grass
in search of these precious trinkets
that are covered with dust.

Our black magic bags-
grandma’s bulging, mine collapsing
And I cannot wait
so I ask her
“Grandma, if
your bag breaks, what will we do?”
And I ask her again
and again she is silent, silent and sill.

The careless wind
carries her perfume
of oatmeal, wool, and soil.
carries her words
that fall into my ears
like the dew in a spider’s web.
carries, carries, carries
to my mother, to me, to my daughter unborn.

“When my bag breaks, you will know what to do,
you will gather my treasures
and carry them all,
all of my treasures in the soul of your ship
and continue the voyage
that was started long before.

And my bag, now yours will be
the gift you’ll give
to the girl
who will someday ask you,
“Grandma, if
your bag breaks, what will we do?”
Nothing, nothing, (the bottomless chasm, the yawning abyss) nothing.

I'm shaking like a wet dog, to rid myself of that which I can't shake. I continue to think and live nonsense upon nonsensing. Who cares anyway in this shit world...

(but rhythm and cycles and patterns and earth mother, dirt, Lydia, chickadees derivatives, sin and cosin curves of a beautiful woman that I know and love...)

With morals lurking directly behind us, his hands rub down my back, lower, lower, to the soft curve and nestles briefly, then up again in a long sweeping sigh motion, with nonsense running between us, in mind, thought, in deed. In what we have done and what we have failed to do. And he asks his blessed father (especially the Son) to aid in his time of need, while we continue to torment each other, reaching closer to our own private hells. Our distant chaperone is ever present in eyes, smiles and restricted actions. The trinity of friendship (my rock) might rock like a shortsided stool, but it won't tip, not yet-- until a leg

(one of us)

breaks

and crashes into

a dragged out spin

into

nothing nothing the type of nothing everyone fears and no one explains (uselessly!!!). When all you want is meaning, and comfort, and you lie restlessly in someone's arms—Again— searching in a kiss, or feeling, for meaning reason doubt TRAGEDY --ANYTHING-- to fill the meaningless void that stretches over the homework table, and fills with fear at every pause of the pen, with every decision of activities is made and--

the moonlight somehow elvishly calls, wishing a pipe to be played. And you are ignorant, and lost in this wish, because you can't fulfill it (but always want to). You whimper at the the pause of your steps, sniffing at a cool night, spying rustling leaves, silhouetted rabbits and cherupping crickets with attitudes. Misplaced and empty, a need is born to rush to the light of your room-- to people, acquaintances, classmates --ANYONE-- to talk to. Hoping to LIVE, to LIVE, to banish the feeling that the emptiness is sort of a nagging death already.
Rain

It is sweltering July, hot
and we constantly pray for rain.
My grandfather stands on our front porch
holding me in his strong arms.
I am six years old and awake past my bedtime.
For a long time we stand silent,
drinking in what we have wished for.
The only sounds are the thunder darkening
the bright flowers in the yard, the rain
and the wind encouraging the trees
to run home, and my grandmother
calling from the basement,
"John, bring that child down here before
you both catch pneumonia."
We don’t really hear her;
we are studying the elm
in our neighbor’s yard,
the elm that has seen
one hundred years of rain.
I cringe as the house across the street
explodes with brightness, and my
grandfather asks if I am scared of the storm.
"Not when I’m with you, Grandpa."
I know that he is scared of nothing.
He smiles and holds me closer,
trying to ward off the day
when even prayers, when even rain,
will not be able to protect me from life,
of which I am not yet afraid.
Birdaard

Why, Jitsche, did your sons
leave this one-windmill village?
And why, Grand Grandma
did they flee to a one-church town?
They really didn't go far.
Entangled in Friesland's watery web.
Birdaard is as far from the red lights
of Amsterdam as is Three Oaks.
They traded the cold winds of the North
for the breezes of a calmer sea
and exchanged Pieter and Renz
for Richard and Philip.
And, sure, windmills are useless in St. Joe's sands
and wooden shoes just make a lot of noise.
But the solitary individuals
searching for Calvin's God,
They're still here.
Four generations and four thousand miles
but now only a mound of dirt's between us.
I came looking for an inheritance
and I've had it all the while.
These bony arms, these long legs,
they're yours, Grand Grandma.
Carried through Ellis by your son
and recycled through the generations:
Dirk, Ransom, David, Andrew.
A humbler House of Orange
with migrating heirlooms:
Four generations and four thousand miles,
and still I feel the windmill groan
and hear the North Sea's call.
Fishing for Mother, the Last Cast

Between the waves,
your plastic body emerges
each black hair, covered by foam
your Japanese complexion, paled deeper in the watery rhythm
eyes of shadows, rotated inwards

Me
on shore

Your puckered lips,
the last suck.
the last breath.
sucking in, sucking in, sucking in
until my hook
is lodged inside your bloated stomach
and the cord
that was severed in childbirth,
now restored with a single strand of fishing line.

Collapsing around my ankles,
crawling up my calves,
collecting between my thighs
is the coldness, the water, the sea
and you,
sucking in my fishline,
drawing my body into yours
and the coldness leaks
into my brain.

“It’s time,” I say into the wind
and between my fingers,
I cut the line.

Between the ripples,
your body, unable to break through the surface,
no longer emerges
and
my body is dry
yet it shivers
and
the white light is gone,
the hook, the line, the pole all gone.
Walking Stick Song

(For my father, who taught me many things.)

For a time, the summer of my tenth year, I lived in the house of my father's lover. Her name was Maria Sol Quiromba, and she lived in Cojimies, a good day's walk south of where we lived. Father became angry with my mother and left with me one Saturday, early. He took me, he told me, to spite her.

"I know that next to that damn hermano Gregario, she loves you more than anything" he snarled. He was very drunk; I don't think he had been to sleep. I remember him entering the dark house. I could hear him breathing and smell the alcohol. There was a noise: the glass from the icons on my mother's altar shattering as he swept his arm across it.

We only took a canvas sack, half full, with bananas and bread. It was heavy because he had an almost full bottle in there. He carried the bag roughly and I could hear it swish as he walked. He was very quiet, concentrating on walking I think, but every once in a while we would stop and he would sit down and drink a little. At those times he would talk.

"Women," he said, pointing to the sea, "are just like the sea." I didn't understand him.

"Even that damn Maria Sol gives me a pain here," he said, his hand on his behind. "Don't tell her I said that." He stared off through the palms for a while. It was a very grey day, with a cold breeze that made the dry palm leaves twitter overhead.

"They're friends, you know," he said. I was thirsty. He had forgotten to bring water.

At noon, we stopped to eat in a little hollow among the palms. After we ate I leaned back in the warm sand and soon was snoring. I walked out to the water's edge. The waves were fairly large, and standing there I didn't need to hear anything or think anything, just stand there and feel the sand slipping away from my feet in a constant stream, loose my eyes in the grey pacific. I missed my mother. I didn't know if I would ever see her again. Everything seemed bigger. The palm trees were singing.

When I was born mama almost died. But one night she dreamt and San Gregario came to her.

"You will live, but you must not have any more babies, even though you are able," he told her. When she began to cry he said,

"Don't worry, querida, this one is enough for you," and put me in her arms. She said that the moment she felt me in her arms, she was cured. The neighbors came the next morning and found her awake, in bed, stroking me and crying, blessing the name of el hermano Gregario, who forever after she called San Gregario.

Because she would only have one child, my mother decided to swear a mando to San Gregario and become his sindica in Muisne, which was the name of our village. From my earliest memories I can remember the people coming to leave the medicines the white doctors had given them with her, on her altar next to the icons and statues, so that San Gregario would lend them healing power. Sometimes they might leave them there for as long as three weeks before returning to collect them and begin their treatment. The priest
used to visit and try to explain to her that San Gregario wasn't really a saint and that she
should stop, but she just said that she was one of the faithful and that no man could judge
her wrong.

"God will see," she told him. The priest would smile and walk away, but Senora
Vega who lived across the street used to mumble and once I think she even wrote to the
bishop. When she saw me walking without my mother she used to call out to her friends,
"Look, there goes the idolator!" and they would all begin to gossip. I hated her, and
when I overheard the priest talking to my father, I hated him too.

My father woke up just before sunset.

"Hsst, boy," he whistled.

"Go collect some wood for a fire. We have to stay here tonight." The sun setting
was like an explosion out at sea. We ate the rest of the food. He began drinking again,
taking long pulls from the bottle, wincing at the sting of the clear liquor, pursing his lips
and brooding, staring out towards the darkening sea. Very late I was dozing when a sharp
pain woke me up. Father was standing over me, very drunk, swaying. I guess he had
kicked me.

"Stand up," he growled. I stood. He hit me on the side of my head and I fell down.
I felt very dizzy and laid still. There was sand in my mouth. He went over by the fire, and
spitting into it, began cursing: me, my mother, San Gregario. He even cursed his friend
the priest.

"Here is a man who has never had a woman," he screamed into the night.

"Who has the balls to look at me and tell me of my wife's sins. Sins!" he snorted.

"I know what that son of a bitch is thinking!" He towered over the fire, swaying
ever so slowly, breathing heavily, seeming to fill that circle of firelight. He was a monster.

When he came at me again I began scrabbling through the sand on my hands and
knees as fast as I could. I fumbled over a piece of firewood and he began kicking me again.
When he was done the firewood was in my hand and I swung it as hard as I could against
his leg. The stick broke, my father yelled and hit me again. He stumbled to the ground
hear the fire and sat holding his leg, cursing.

I must have slept, and when I woke up my father was hugging me and crying. He
had me so tight I couldn't move. He smelled horrible, and the wetness of his tears and
saliva on my cheek made me sick. After a long time he began snoring and I crawled away.
I found the bottle and emptied it into the sand. Then I crawled (Oh how slowly I crawled!)
back to his inert form. I could barely stop from shaking as I reached into his pocket.
Finally I found it, his knife, and I carefully withdrew my hand with the knife firmly
clenched in my fingers. I opened it and stared at the light gleaming on the blade, and then
I looked at my father for a very long time. The roar of the breakers was in my veins; my
temples throbbed like drums: I could feel them pulsing against the thin bone of my skull; I
was breathing too fast and the salty taste of blood slowly filled my mouth--I was biting
down, hard, on the inside of my cheek. Much later, with mild surprise, I realized that I
was merely staring vacantly at the reflected flicker of firelight on his black leather boot. I
realized my left leg was asleep. Putting the knife in my
wcket
I crawled away from him,
towards the other side of the fire. There I could faintly hear the sound of the waves on the
shore, and a cool breeze ruffled my hair. I laid on my back and stared at the stars and the
sound of the palm trees swaying, enchanting, was the most beautiful sound I ever heard.
“Look,” my father said the next day. He was showing me some tracks in the sand. He squatted down and deftly outlined one of the tracks with a thick finger. He was a very dark man, my father, small but compact and well dimensioned. He worked hard and his muscles stretched the thin fabric of his shirts. His hair and eyes were black, his teeth very white, and his nose, broken once, rested between the craggy hollows of his strong cheekbones and eyes. Both my mother and Maria Sol often said that he was sometimes the most beautiful man they had ever seen. So he was that morning, shining in the sand, looking as if he never drank, looking like a hunter.

“There was a tundo here last night” he said.

“Look here, at this pair of tracks. Do you see?” I nodded.

“One of their feet is always clubbed, the other normal, so you can always tell when one has been around because they leave tracks like these. Did you see it?” he asked, and I shook my head. He sat back in the sand.

“Last night, I thought your Aunt Tomasa came here. I looked up and saw her standing just outside the light. I stood up, thinking your mama had sent her, and told her to come over by the fire. When she was in the light, I looked at her feet, and one of them was like this,” he made a fist.

“But it was too late, and she made me crazy. Do you understand: that is what the tundo do: they come to you in the form of a woman, and when you trust them they steal part of your soul and this makes you crazy. That is why I hit you.” He was staring at the clouds.

“The sky was blue.

“Later she tried to come back and we fought and I got that part of my soul back. You all right?” he asked me. I nodded.

When we arrived at the house of Maria Sol I was very hungry. She was watching us with a funny look on her face. She was very pretty.

“That woman is going to make me crazy,” is all my father said to her, and then he went into the bedroom. Maria Sol knelt down and looked at me. She was crying.

“Are you hungry?” she asked me. I nodded and told her my name was Jose, and she nodded.

“I know.” She was crying and she hugged me. We hugged for a long time before she went into the kitchen to cook.

We stayed there most of the summer. My father worked for don Santiago, who owned a large boat. I worked with him, making the nets into neat piles and spotting for the dolphins that always mark where the tuna are. My father was a hard worker, and don Santiago treated us well. At dusk we would return to the house and at night he would go out to drink and gamble, and then they would fight in the dark. Afterwards Maria Sol would come into my bedroom and lie down next to me, crying.

“I am living in sin,” she cried. I hugged her and told her stories and she held my hand.

Some days I didn’t work on the boat. And although I loved the blue ocean sky and the up and down of the boat, the spray of salt and the way my father’s and don Santiago’s arms gleamed as they worked in the sun, those days were my favorites. I worked in the house and yard for her, or helped her cook and we would play games and talk and tell each other great silly lies. On those days Maria Sol was always smiling. Once we wrote a letter to my mother and she found a man who would carry it to her for us.
I became a little taller that summer, as boys do. My skin grew dark and taut from working in the sun and salt air. I was stronger. I taught myself how to carve with my father’s knife, and became fairly good, and I used to give my carvings to Maria Sol or try to sell them at the Saturday market. In this way I began to make a little money for myself.

There was a Saturday when Maria Sol and I made a picnic on the beach. We spent the whole day there, and I made up a story for her, about a family of dolphins that lived just off the coast. They were constantly playing and laughing, as most dolphins do. But at night they would swim in close to the shore, near where Maria Sol’s house was, and there they would float on the waves in the moonlight and sing symphonies, special songs written for Maria Sol by the youngest brother who had seen her one day walking sadly on the shore, and had fallen in love with her. I told her that on some clear nights, I could hear them singing out there, celebrating the beauty of the sun by the light of the moon.

That afternoon, back at the house, we were very quiet. My father was sleeping off a drunk. I was working in the garden when Maria Sol came to me with a long piece of dark wood.

"This is for you," she said, "to carve. It comes from the east, from great forests. Some day you will go there."

"Then I suppose I will make it into a walking stick," I laughed, "because if I go I will have to go all the way on foot." She smiled.

"So you will, one painful step at a time. But you will go there."

And so I got my walking stick. At the top I rounded out a sun, with its rays wrapping down to blend into ocean waves filled with dancing dolphins. Below this were the palms, and the tuna, and the leaves of the dark forests, all intertwined and connected. And beneath it all I carved a fire and my father’s hard face and an eternity of sand in dunes, for wherever I walk I always feel the sand between my toes. I worked on it for weeks and weeks, and finished out the summer nights polishing it with oil and a piece from the stomach of a cow.

There came a night when my father came home in very bad shape, and found himself incapable of making love to Maria Sol. I could hear him shouting. He believed that she had gone to a brujo and paid for a ligadura to tie him to only one woman—my mother.

"You’ve tied me to that bitch in Muisne, haven’t you!" he screamed.

"You and your damn guilt, your damn eyes, always crying!" I heard her say something to him and then I heard it: the sound of his hard hand striking her. She began to scream and I found myself out of my bed, my walking stick in my hand. And then I was in the room—running, I remember, without stopping, without seeing—crashing into my father, carrying him with surprising ease out the back door to the moonlit sand. It was a large moon and my father’s white teeth gleamed as he grinned at me in the dark. I hefted my walking stick in my hands. The palm trees were singing in the breeze, and as I began to move forward my father’s grin faded. I swung my stick in calculated arcs and it made a noise as it cut through the cool air. I was calm. I could hear the waves crashing on the shore.

"No more," I said. My voice was high and level.

"If you hurt them any more I will kill you. I swear it." I realized silent tears were running down my cheeks. I felt the rage moving through me like an empowering current,
a tide. It was profound. Moving quickly for one so drunk, my father stepped forward and grabbed the stick with a firm hand. We stood like that, the stick neither truly in my possession nor in his. He leaned in and stared at my face for one long screaming moment. I could see his shoulder muscle tense with the urge to strike me, smell the alcohol on his breath, and then he released the stick, raised both hands and backed away. I watched him walking down the road for a long time in the dim light. I was trembling. Maria Sol came out with a wet towel on her face.

"I saw," she said. "Let's go down to the beach." She took my hand and we walked and sat on the water's edge. We held each other's cool hands and she began to cry in deep ragged sobs that shattered the serenity of the dark sea. When she was done she leaned her head on my shoulder.

"And where are the dolphins tonight, Jose?" she asked.

"Why aren't they singing?"

"They're there," I said, pointing out over the waves.

"Watching. They are sad tonight. Their silence is a song of sadness." She took my hand in hers and smiling, looked me in the eyes.

"Tomorrow you leave," she said.

On my way out of town I passed don Santiago. He was basking in the sun's early morning warmth on a pile of nets. When he saw me he stood up. The sun sparkled in the white bristles of his beard. I gave him my bag of money.

"This is for Maria Sol, please," I said. He nodded.

"On my word, don Jose, I will give it to her," he said somberly. He seemed to be making fun of me, calling me don.

"And this is for you," he told me, handing me a little package.

"Open it when you alone on the shore," he said, pointing north. I nodded and thanked him. He held out his hand and I shook it. Then taking off his hat, he gave me a little bow, and returned to his pile of nets. I turned northward.

That day I stopped in the little hollow of sand and palms and ate my lunch. I opened the package. It was a little shell hanging on a necklace of net cordage with bits of black sea coral worked into the weave. I recognized don Santiago's careful work. The cord smelled of salt and the sea. I put part of it in my mouth: sweat and saltwater. I wear it still, and wherever I am I can listen to the shell and hear the wave, and when I am nervous or afraid I suck the cord and taste the sea.

I decided to spend the night there in the hollow. I had some water, bread and cheese, my father's knife, the gift of don Santiago and my shiny walking stick. I sat in the shimmering sunset light, running my fingers over its grooves and shapes. I realized I had not carved myself into the stick but then I knew: it was like a voice softly speaking, singing, chanting in my ear that said you are the strength of the wood that gives all these things form you are like the wood. That night the moon rose full through the sighing palms and as I spiralled into slumber I thought I heard the dolphins' song over the fire's whispering flames.
cauldron