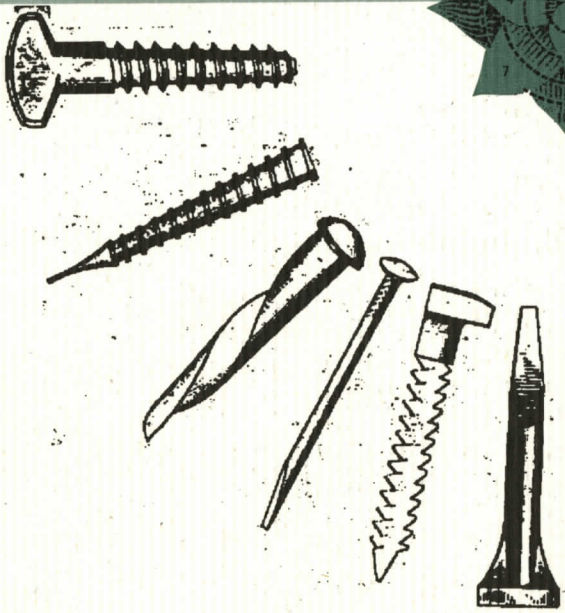
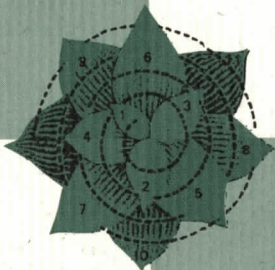
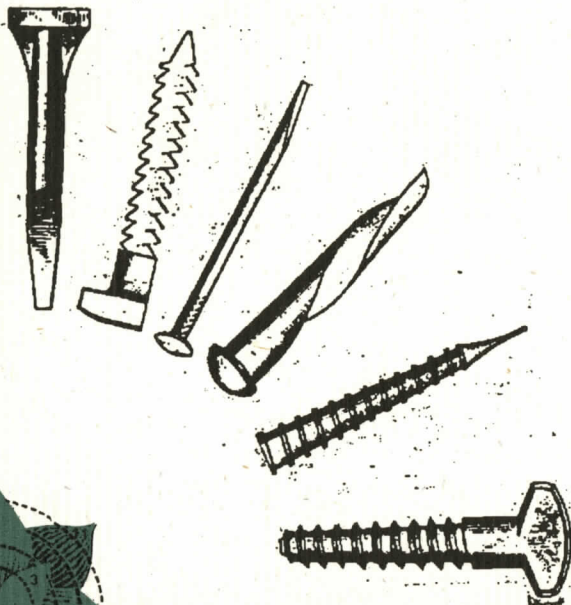


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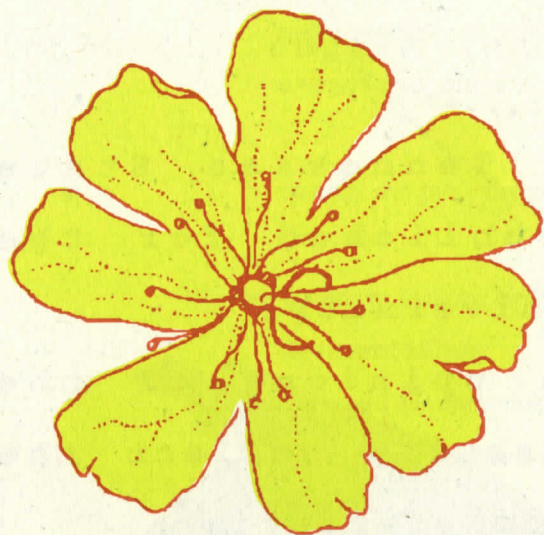
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"I'll harm you ..." I said.

"Touch me once," was her reply.

I think I'm getting over the sickness now.

This is my dream:

My lover has jetglow hair

and a pearlescent pallor,

a head full of holes

and a body to match ...

though she can't say why.

We live boxed up in a one bedroom

like cereal killers:

Odd Ed Gein and his crazy little Mama

hopped up on Crunchberries, Blood on the Tracks.

Or is it FD&C Red no. 5?

Yesterday I told her I'm writing the Great American Novel,

just before I bent her over the radiator

to work the old will.

She won't leave, ever.

This cardboard carnival goes one way, baby.

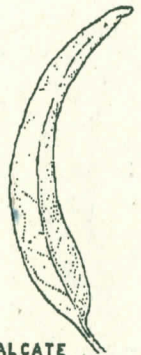
Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know

By James R. McCulloch

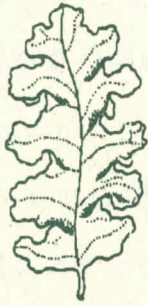


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t h r e e



FALCATE



UNDULATE

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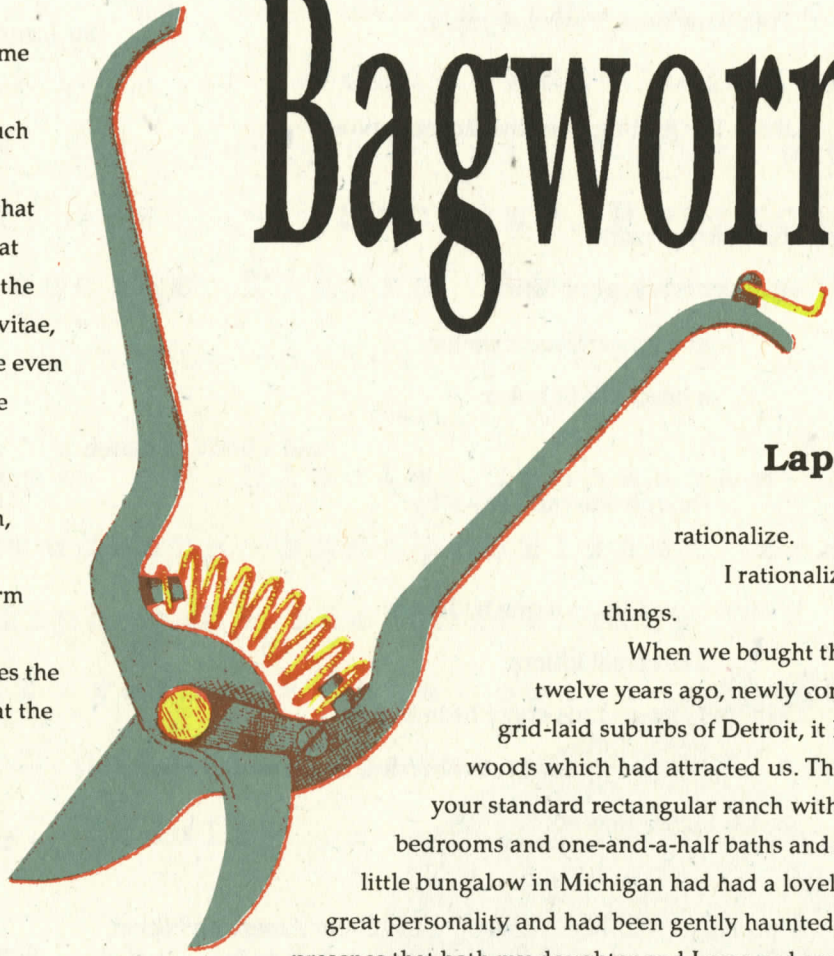
I'm wearing bright yellow rubber gloves and a red sundress, sweating like a pig, pulling bagworms off my arborvitae. It's a yearly ritual, this race between predators; me removing the clever leafy cocoons before the small worms inside can devour my cherished shrubs. I'd never known such things existed until I moved to Tennessee. It's one of the deceptive things about Tennessee; the flora is so similar to that of Michigan—oak and maple, conifers and the odd elm—that the differences in fauna take you by surprise. The first year the bagworms emerged from the woods to chomp on my arborvitae, they'd had a pretty free hand of it. I didn't realize they were even there, their camouflage was so effective, until they had done considerable harm.

I don't care for the bagworms, but I refuse to use pesticides. Other critters live within the shrubs—pale green, translucent, aerodynamically impossible insects of fragile mortality, white moths, lightning bugs—and they do no harm and are welcome to stay. Which leaves me the option I am exercising this day, that of picking bagworms from the leaves the way I once picked blueberries, without the reward of a pie at the end.

At first, I had simply gathered up the worms, doused them with gasoline, and watched them fry. Over the years, though, I have developed a fairer, if still inhumane, way of dealing with them. I gather them up and dump them at the edge of the woods. Some of them writhe their way back into the foliage, where they still do harm, I'm sure, but that's invisible to my eyes. Most of them are eaten by the birds. A congregation of jays has laid claim to a fallen limb near the edge and that's where I'm dumping the worms this year. Early tomorrow morning, there will be a feeding frenzy—jays as land sharks, jays intimidating all other birds except themselves and the errant mockingbird away from the feast until they are sated, and maybe longer, just to be ornery. Maybe 5 percent of the bagworms will escape to become whatever it is they become in the fullness of time. Better than the 100 percent fatality rate of the gasoline, I

Bagworms

by
**Kate
Lapczynski**



rationalize.

I rationalize many things.

When we bought this house twelve years ago, newly come from the grid-laid suburbs of Detroit, it had been the woods which had attracted us. The house is your standard rectangular ranch with three bedrooms and one-and-a-half baths and no soul. Our little bungalow in Michigan had had a lovely soul and a great personality and had been gently haunted by a female presence that both my daughter and I saw and sensed. I saw her several times at night where my reflection in the window should have been, and Kelly had felt her as a physical presence in the house. We never discussed her while we lived in the house. My husband, Dave, used to my fancies, discouraged my mentioning her with his total disinterest, and I was afraid to ask the children about her for fear of frightening them.

Years after we moved South, over a year after Kelly moved into her own apartment, she and I exchanged information about the lady, validating each other's secret experiences. No such

experiences have been shared in the Tennessee house. It's newer, bigger, less quirky in design, functional and cold. No amount of decorating effort has ever made it homey.

But the woods are nice.

Of course, the Southern contractors hadn't believed us when we had told them that we wanted the woods to come right to the back door. In the time between the signing on the house and the moving into it, they had proudly carved out a backyard for us that we didn't want. They never seemed to understand our anger.

The neighbors never seemed to understand us, either, though there were fewer of them in the beginning than there are now. They had not found the original woods unsightly, but found the reestablishment of the woods extremely so.

We planted trees and refused to mow the lawn we did not want. One neighbor would come over when we were away and manicure our yard for us. It took a restraining order and the threat of a lawsuit to keep her and her machete out of our yard.

We finally planted blackberries right up to the property line and installed a fence we did not want to corral the dog we did not want but needed to prevent trespass. And after twelve years, the woods are coming back, and the blackberries attract birds of all descriptions and small animals.

I have never been invited into a neighbor's house for a cup of coffee in twelve years. I miss that. Yankees are supposed to be so rude and so cold, and yet the last real sense of community I felt was in Yankeeland. We had good neighbors who got to be friends. Mike, a tailor who had been a bear in a previous incarnation, and his wife

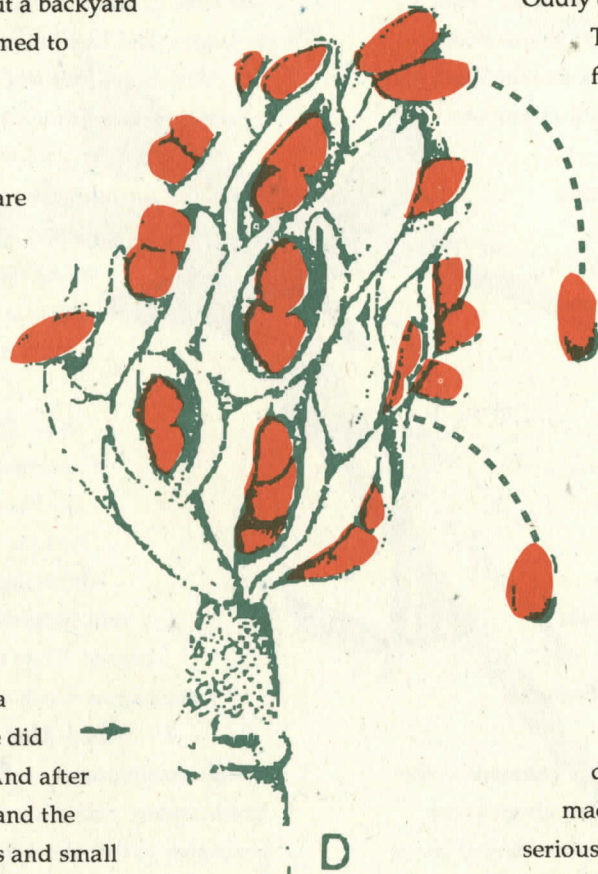
Anne, who was trying to be a wraith in this one, became particular friends. Mike would pick Kelly up for school and then stop back for coffee. He made Civil War uniforms for the Fort Wayne Museum and all the reenactment companies through out the Southeast. Once a year Mike and Anne and Dave and I would don the gorgeous antebellum uniforms and gowns he made for us and step back into the past at the Muzzleloaders Competition at Greenfield Village in Dearborn.

Oddly enough, we always went as Confederates.

Then we moved to Tennessee, where at first I made friends among the "Confederates" through the church. We were practicing Catholics at the time and I became involved with the church, sang with the choir, helped at the school. That lasted only as long as my faith, since it was my faith which drove my husband and children into the pews every Sunday. Over time, little things began to prey on my mind. Not the big things, like celibate men telling women they couldn't practice birth control and should never divorce a drunken, abusive husband. Early in my life I had learned to ignore the assholery of men, and priests are just men.

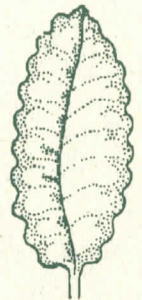
No, it was the little things, like transubstantiation, the literal conversion of an unleavened wafer and a drop of red wine into the actual flesh and blood of Christ. If this doctrine is valid, are we not, then, at communion, made cannibals? No priest would discuss this with me seriously. Priests don't take women seriously except as symbols of complete purity and symbols of complete depravity with no room for humanity between the extremes.

I do miss Mass, however. I loved the Mass, though not as much in English as I did when it was in solemn, mysterious, incomprehensible Latin. I loved the austere stripping of the altar on Good Friday, the long vigil, the sudden joy on Easter Sunday when

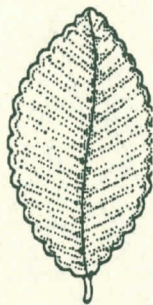


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SINUATE



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the altar was restored to its former glory. I loved the changing of the vestments with the seasons and the feast days and the pagan history each represented.

And then I realized that I am a pagan. I am a pantheist and an animist. I believe that everything is alive, and I talk to everything.

When they pulled my old washer out of the laundry room to replace it with a new one, I went out into the driveway with a sincere heart to say goodbye to the old one and to thank it for its many years of good service. The repairman looked at me like I was crazy. That's when I knew I couldn't be a Catholic anymore.

There is a particularly healthy crop of bagworms this year. Maybe it was the mild winter or the overlong, moist spring that allowed them to be so prolific. I'll have to clean them off several more times before I can reasonably assume that I have salvaged the arborvitae for another year.

Arborvitae was a bad choice for shrubbery this close to the woods. Boxwood or juniper would have been wiser, but then, who knew that arborvitae was the meal of choice of insects unknown to me at the time we planted them? Who knew that Kentucky Bluegrass would not grow on this barren, acid soil or that red clay, rather than black loam, supported the profusion of plant life?

The plant life in this state is prodigious. Tennessee in the spring is a sight to behold. I have transplanted just about every wildflower known to man into our yard over the last twelve years, and they thrive where cultivated plants would wither and die. The tenacity of the flora here humbles me. It makes me wonder, as I pull the bagworms from my shrubs, if I have unconsciously chosen my branch of biology. Am I a botanist? I ask, as I sacrifice animal life to prolong plant life. It isn't often that one feels compelled to rush to the rescue of plant life here. It is ubiquitous and lush and seems

impervious to real harm. Maybe the reason I like trees and shrubs so much is that they seem eternal. These trees have been here long before I arrived and will endure long after I depart. I know that they are mortal but they are not eminently mortal. They aren't fragile and ephemeral like animal life seems to be.

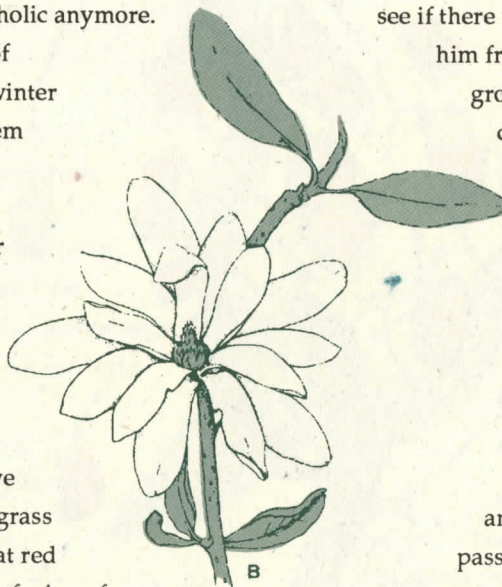
Some years ago a small bird flew into our picture window and fell stunned to the ground. At first he stood up and shook himself off, and I thought he was going to be okay. Then he began to quaver and lose his balance. His beak was broken, his beak that is a projection of his skull. I called Mrs. Luckadoo, the bird lady, to see if there was anything I could do for him. She said protect him from cats and make his passing tranquil. I lay on the ground beside him for 45 minutes, protecting him from cats and murmuring what I hoped were comforting sounds until he finally died. I buried him deep so the cats and dogs wouldn't dig him up and make sport with his tiny dead body.

I have become good at death watches. I have the patience for them and the courage. I learned my death watch skills from my neighbors, the Shearers, whose baby died of leukemia when I was 11. They gave him a life which they endlessly chronicled with photographs and films, photographs and films that were too painful to watch after he had passed. They broke my heart as I watched them try to capture as much of his life as time would permit them.

I watched. That is what the people who are not doing the dying are supposed to do. They are there to be a witness, to be a handmaiden, and to swallow the fear and the anger that death generates so that the dying may indulge in theirs.

I watched my daughter die the whole of her life of two months. I watched my mother die slowly over the nine years it took her to develop the courage to let go. I watched my friend Frankie die of superfluity and booze.

There was some closure, at least, in Frankie's death. Brenda and I prepared her body for burial. Brenda is a hairdresser,

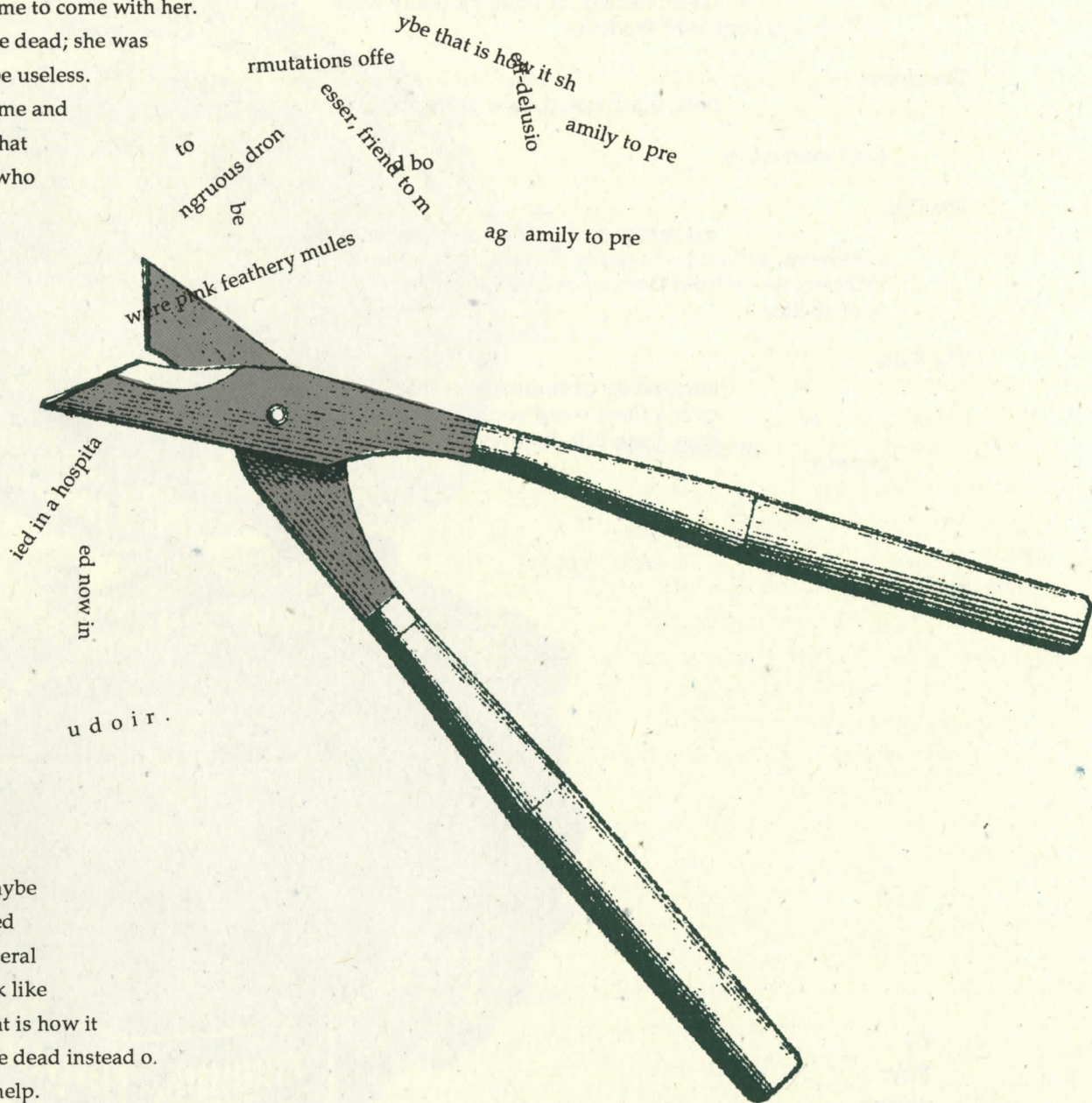


friend to me and Frankie, and had been asked by the family to prepare Frankie's body. She asked me to come with her. She didn't want to be alone with the dead; she was afraid she would lose control and be useless.

We went to the funeral home and were admitted into the cold room that Frankie shared with an older lady who had been surprised by death in her boudoir. The aged body was wrapped in a pink feathery peignoir and there were pink feathery mules on her feet. Her face had been carefully made up and her hair neatly combed when death had reminded her of her true age.

Frankie was nude under a sheet. She had died in a hospital where no self-delusions had been allowed her. We washed and set her hair, listening to the incongruous drone of the hair dryer. Brenda applied Frankie's make-up; I gave her cold hands their last manicure. In a different time, we would have done these things for her in her own home, maybe even in her own bed, but we worked now in the silent sterility of the funeral home cold room. We made her look like Frankie and went home. Maybe that is how it should be, loved ones preparing the dead instead of strangers, friends instead of hired help.

Death in all its permutations offends me, I acknowledge bagworms.



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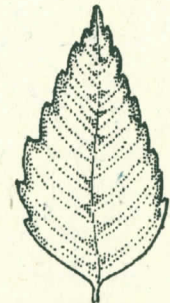
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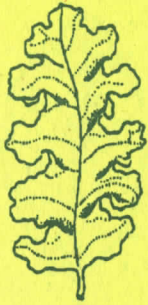
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S E R R A T E



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eight

The Satellite dish
disconnected, directed eternally west
only makes very little shade for

The Horse
once uneducated, now an expert in perimeters.

Both marked by

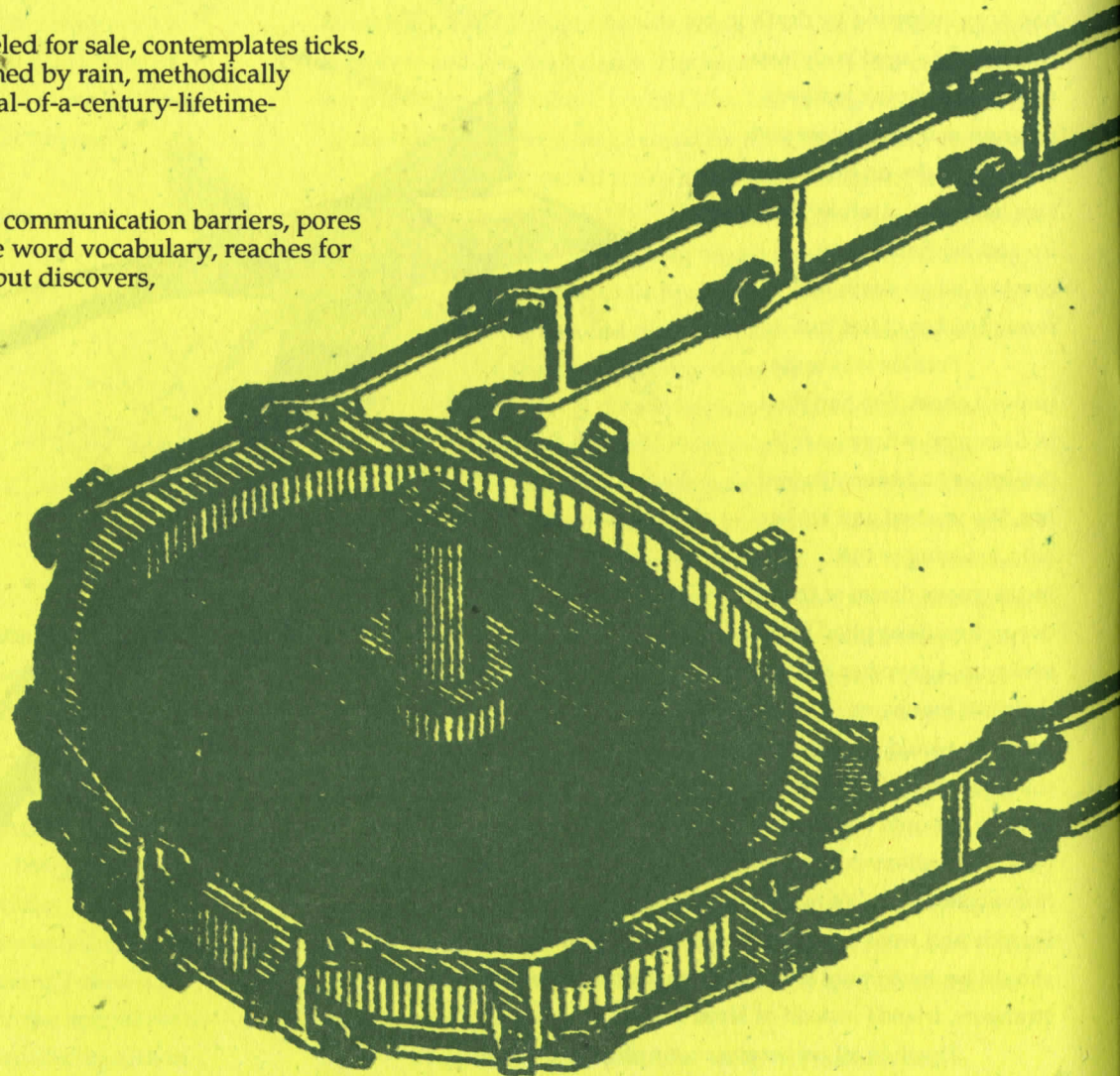
The Dog
too mongreled for sale, contemplates ticks,
pavement, and rust—hastened by rain, methodically
dripping down from the deal-of-a-century-lifetime-
boat-shelter.

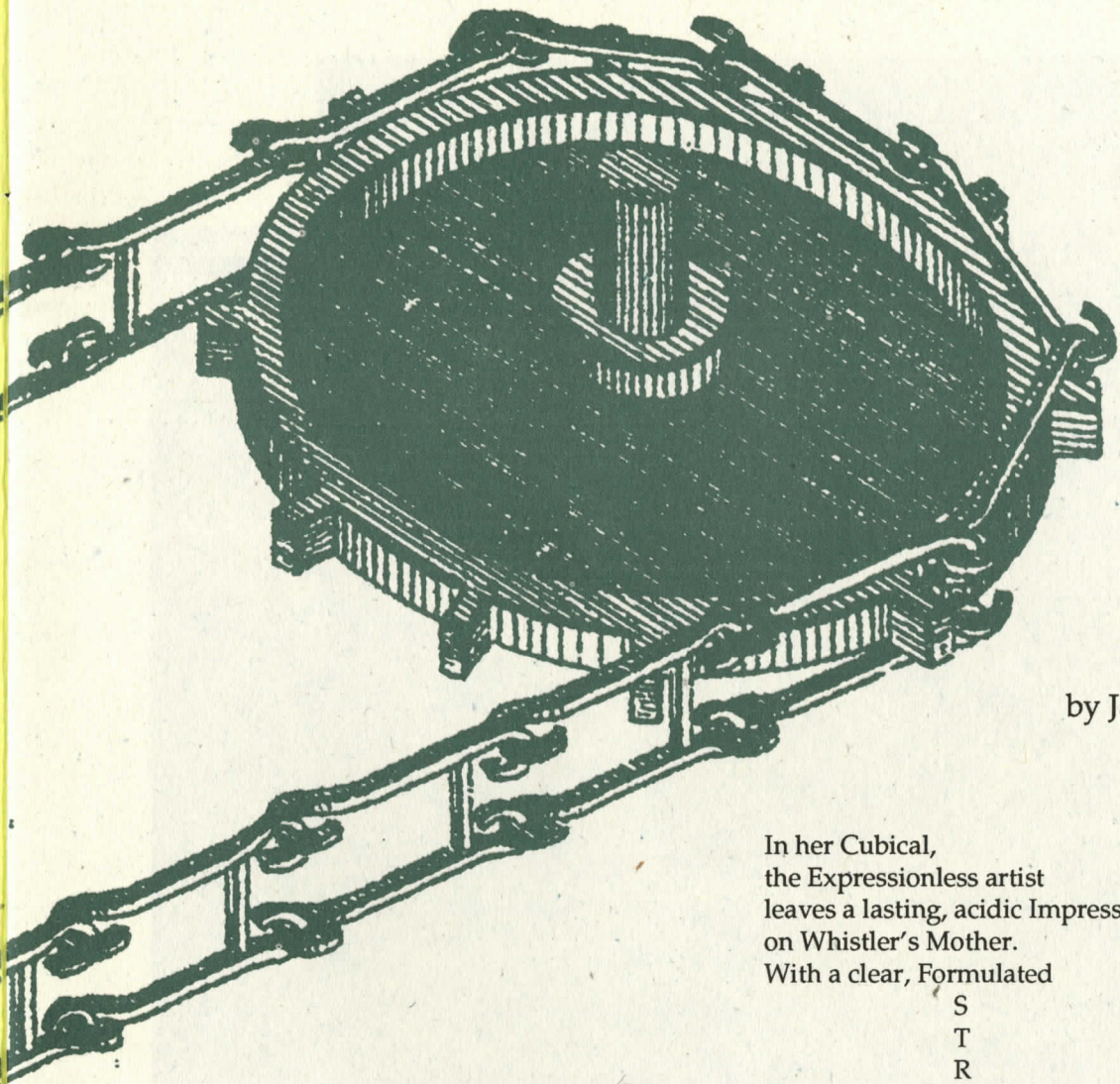
The Baby,
angered by communication barriers, pores
over a three word vocabulary, reaches for
Bear-Bear, but discovers,
instead,

The Monitor.

by
Jay
Jones

The Reception





Movement

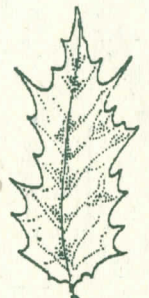
by Jay Jones

In her Cubical,
the Expressionless artist
leaves a lasting, acidic Impression
on Whistler's Mother.
With a clear, Formulated

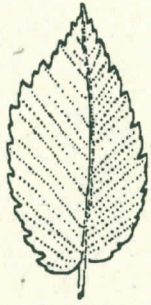
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she evens the score with Dada.

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DOUBLY
SERRATE

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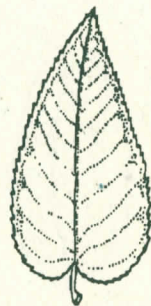


Aimee Triggs



Lutie Lovett

e l e v e n



SERRULATE

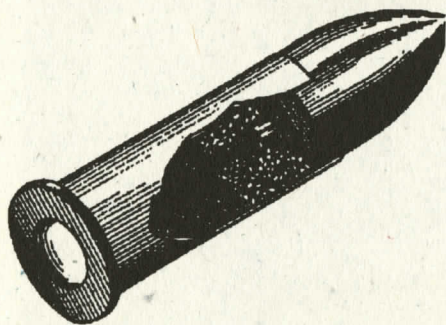


DENTATE

t w e l v e

Sitting in Their Living Room

(As a Child Too Young to Know the War)



6

1

Sitting in their living room, watching Cronkite
Sing the blues,
My grand old man listens carefully to the count of
Those killed.
He sometimes leans over aiming his spit
Into His spitune.
And I, in my restless youth, am told angrily
"Be Still,"
"Be Still...
Listen to the News."

Boo-Boo, the cat, is sitting like a human
Against the door, and
My grand old lady cries & laughs hysterically, and I notice
Her baldness.
I was startled, I had never seen
This before.
I saw for the first time, as a little boy, the meanness,
The sadness,
The madness
of Listening to the Evening News.

They sit looking into far away places.
Their eyes are glazed over; their minds consumed by
the war's condition.
A fly flies spastically around the old man's
Hairy ear.
But he is not bothered, he only peers
Into his television, into
America's vision, into his
(Country's) decision.

He sometimes leans over to aim his spit
Into his spitune.
And I, in my restless youth, am told...
"be still,
be still
Listen to the News."

2

I was yearning for Room to do my living, but NO, NO,
NO, "Be still and Listen." Why?
So I too can
Grow old, grow bruised
Grow bald and blue?
OH, She seems so set,
So tragically low,
As she rocks in her chair
in her living room.
—Her living room—

She rocks and rocks in her
Living Room.

I so much want to scream and cry
Just to let them know I'm Alive!

I am Alive!

Just like that pestering fly,
But I remain still, as death...

Sometimes drawing a little breath
Sometimes drawing aliens
(in a paper tablet—Imagining with an eraserless pencil).

3

This living room is no Romper Room!
No place for me to move—in circles
around, around in freedom around, around!

No, I am quickly told
"Sit Down, Sit Down, Please SIT DOWN!"

So, I, restless in my age, squirm and squeal
and start to move...I decide to play
with Boo-Boo—that's what I'll do!

But quickly I am told by both in scolding chant
"BE STILL
BE STILL
LISTEN TO THE NEWS!"

4

Now all is quiet.
He is comfortable in his couch, and takes
from his pocket a leather pouch
A twist of dark, sickly leaves and
with his knife he cuts so clean
a piece too big for him to chew.

And to me it seems that everyone
would be a lot less blue
If only they would live
in their Living Room.

By
Mark Roberts



2



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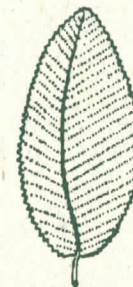


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11

t h i r t e e n



DENTICULATE



CILIATE

fourteen



Donna Hoff's



Donna Hoff's

fifteen



FIMBRIATE



ROSE

Dori Sanders:

She never thought of herself as much more than a South Carolina peach farmer. *Dirt*—now that's a topic she can discuss at length. Peaches, too. Her family runs one of the largest black-owned farms in York County. Okra, corn, sweet potatoes and peanuts all drift through her conversation like leaves breezing across the

water at her favorite fishing hole.

The sweet accents and humid texture of her voice stick like molasses and smell like the sassafras she used to pick in her neighbor's yard. They cling to her like a halo, filled with color, sound and energy. When she talks, the words reverberate around her, bouncing off walls and ceilings. She flails her arms around in every direction, as if fanning herself under a hot sun or swatting away a swarm of yellowjackets.

Her picturesque conversations about everyday life are filled with romanticism and passion, yet she chooses her words carefully. The intonation of her voice rises and falls much like the mountains near her birthplace in the foothills of King's Mountain.

Her name is Dori Sanders. She was born the eighth of 10 children. Her father was a teacher and principal at the local elementary school, while her mother had her hands full at home. Even though Dori's aspirations never went beyond three good peach seasons in a row, she grins and says she couldn't be happier with the success of her first novel, *Clover*, which was published in 1990.

The photographer who took her picture for the book jacket told her the book would never sell.

"He said, 'Maybe, just maybe, a few old ladies in rocking chairs might buy it, but nobody else.'"

After *Clover* went into its fifth printing and had been translated into six languages, she showed him the Danish, Japanese, Swedish and German versions—all featuring his photo.

"Aaaaauuah," she said, as she waved the books in front of him.

In Her Place

By Sam C. Gannon

"Now, how did you get your photograph and name printed here in Denmark? Seems like

your little photo made it all the way to Sweden, too.' I had to show him 'cause he hurt my feelings, saying my book wouldn't sell," she sighs.

"I said, 'You know, Paul, there's a whole lot of old ladies in the world, ain't there?' And he almost *died*."

The Sanders family farm is shaped like a horseshoe, encompassing hundreds of acres of fine South Carolina soil. She knows the land, yet she walks its paths like a frontiersman on the edge of a great new discovery.

Dori presses her lips firmly together pronouncing her words with conviction and tried and true compassion. Each word—each syllable—is a precious child to her. She is the mother of millions, maybe even trillions, this year alone.

"I talk a lot," Dori explains, "and I've talked that way since I was a child."

Dori grew up with nine brothers and sisters, and, being number eight, she found it hard to get in a word edgewise.

"They wouldn't let me talk," she recalls.

"They'd say, 'Oh, you're too little; we've got to talk about big important things.' And I said, 'If I ever get to talk, I'm going to talk as much as I want—I'm going to talk my head clean off—and that's how it happened.'"

She still talks. Her voice demands attention, even when she talks about talking.

Her eyes dance as her hands and arms work overtime with excitement and energy. She spins a tapestry of words, filling every crevice of the forest around her.

In 1915, when he was getting ready to marry, Dori's father bought 81

acres of land, some of which presently makes up part of the Sanders farm.

In a clearing, a few long, worn slabs of concrete make up all that's left of the big house. In the center is the area called the parlor, where people still meet to talk. A large, two-story wooden barn is located 100 yards from the parlor. The cedar door to the barn is a foot thick. What was once the sweet potato house is now home for snakes and outdated farming utensils.

"We used to raise so many sweet potatoes that the children had to get out of school for two weeks at 12 o'clock to come and work on the farm," Dori recalls.

"Everyone would have his person, and we would work with them and show them how to pick up grade-A potatoes. Then we would rotate to another person, 'cause we were paying those kids and you had to get the bread out of them. You had to stay with them."

Back at the parlor, flames and smoke pour from a large metal barrel that stands in the center. The fire warms the men and women who gather around to warm themselves and remember the good ol' days.

"It's just an outdoor gossip parlor," Dori explains. "This is where I get the ideas for all my stories. Everyone sits here, and they talk and talk.

"This is my well spring," she laughs.

A large oak tree standing near the sweet potato house was planted in 1934 for the birth of one of the children, Dori points out, as she walks toward the oak.

"I remember the day that tree was set out, the day that person was born. I used it in my new book, Her Own Place."

She begins to quote a passage from her new story: "The only day Mae Lee Barnes could pinpoint for sure that her husband was home was the day her son Taylor was born. On that day, out of pride and joy, Jeff Barnes planted a tree."

Her attention turns back to the men around the fire. Today's parlor group includes Dori's brothers Orestus and Jarvis, and Rufus, a family friend. The discussion of the day is delectable foods: possum and raccoon and cooters.

"A cooter is a large green turtle," Dori explains, "and the meat of a cooter is wonderful." As she speaks, her lips seem to taste the succulent meat. "A cooter has the taste of how many different meats, Orestus?"

"They say 39."

"Forty," Jarvis corrects.

"Forty-one," Rufus says, giving the final decision.

"Do I hear 40? Do I hear 41?" Dori chimes in, raising her arms and looking for bidders. "Ooooh, ooooh, their meat is to die for."

Orestus tosses some old tar shingles onto the fire, creating a great cloud of smoke and a pungent smell, which forces the parlor guests to seek

warmth elsewhere.

Dori walks around the farm to the peach orchard near the highway. The black and white paint on the Sanders family produce stand sticks out against the dark brown dirt. A large section of a tree trunk sits just beneath the roof.

"This is where I sit and write," she says, pointing to the trunk. "This one and that one," she says, pointing to a shorter, smaller stump, "is where Clover was written."

Between customers Dori wrote and wrote, and shaped the characters for Clover.

"I've always been here since I was a child," she smiles as she sits on the withered stump. "The farming life is here."

Dori says she also got ideas for Clover while working at the produce stand. Two funeral processions passed the Peach Shed. Inside a car of the first procession was a little black girl.

"I figured she was about 10 years old. She waved at me, and I waved back to her."

On another day a funeral for a white person went by.

"These people were driving the Jaguars, the Mercedes, fancy cars. I thought, 'Money, money, money! One of those big CEOs up at one of them North Carolina textile mills must have croaked,' 'cause it was money!"

"There was this blonde woman who looked out at me, and we looked at each other and smiled and shared that familiar sadness. But we didn't wave."

"Then it hit me a few days later--woooomp!" she snaps her fingers. "What if that little girl from the first funeral group wound up with the woman from the second

group? Two people. What if. Then I said, 'I've got to get them together. I've got to address their differences, because if I get them together I've got to address the question 'What if.'"

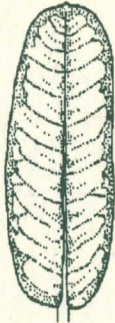
"I wasn't consciously setting out to write a book about race relations, but rather about people, and it just happened that way."

Dori now had her main characters, but how could she get the white woman and little black girl together? She had the seeds, but could she make them grow?

"She could adopt the child, and then I remembered something President Reagan said: 'If a parent adopts a child, then the parent wants the child. An adopted child should never feel neglected, because the parent didn't have to go out and get the child.'"

"And I wouldn't have any conflict. Sara Kate would want to stay if she had adopted the girl. Then I said, 'What if it happened all by chance? What if they were thrown together by circumstances beyond their control?' Could they





OBLONG

make a life together?"

When people ask why she had Clover's father killed, she says she simply had no other choice.

"I rightly didn't know how to write him in and keep the story going. I didn't need him. It wasn't his story. It was this: two people, a woman and a little girl. Could they make a life together? And that's why--boom!" she slaps her hands together, "when I started out I killed off Gaten."

She nestles down in her favorite chair in the den of her sister Virginia's house, where she sometimes stays. The afternoon sun is streaking through the blinds, and a fire is crackling nearby. She looks pleasantly surprised as the front yard fills with black birds, quenching their thirst with last night's rainwater.

Dori is not a college graduate. She did take some courses at the local community college, but never anything that would give her the training to be an award-winning novelist. She never planned to write a best seller, or travel the country on book tours or speak to hundreds of students about writing--and about Clover. She never expected her book to be required reading in high schools, let alone part of the curriculum of universities.

"I didn't set out to be a writer," Dori explains.

"Somebody pushed me and pushed me and pushed me. I was never trained to be a writer, and I didn't study writing."

It all began in Baltimore at the hotel where Dori worked during the off-season.

"It's just that I so happened to write something on the back of a menu where I was working," Dori recalls. "I was setting up for a wedding for someone from the Air Force base, and then an idea hit me, and I thought, 'Oh, my goodness, I've got a story idea,' 'cause I was writing down stories for my nieces and nephews, trying to lure them back to the farm, and I was writing something about the sharecropping experience."

"I just picked up a menu and started writing on it and writing and writing. Then someone called me, and I left it there. The owner of the hotel walked in and she picked it up, 'Ohhhh,' she said, 'someone's been writing on the backs of these menus. Don't you know how much these cost?'"

"She was furious and her eyes blazed," Dori recalls. "Who did this? Who did it?" she asked, and I just kept on working. I said to myself, 'I'm from a family of 10. I'm not going to 'fess up to anything 'til I have to.' So I just kept on working. Then she started to read. And she said, 'Wooooo.' She pursed her lips. She said, 'Oh, who wrote this? It's so good.'

"I did," Dori reenacts the scene, jumping up with one hand in the air.

"'Oh, you can write,' the woman said. 'The imagery...it's so good. You must try and get published.'

When Dori returned home to South Carolina, the hotel owner

continued to call her. "She called today,' someone would say.

"'Why?' I said to myself, 'Why does she call?'"

"So I called her back and she asked, 'Are you writing? Have you tried to get published?'"

"Then I decided, I'm going to finish this story, get it over with and prove to this woman that I can't write. I can get her off my back once and for all times."

Dori called a general number at Algonquin Books and spoke to a receptionist.

"Hello, this is Dori Sanders, I'm getting ready to send you-all my book, and I just want to know whose name to put on the outside."

"Do you have a literary agent?" the voice on the other end of the phone asked.

"A whaaaaat? Miss, please give me someone's name, this call is costing me. I'm a South Carolina peach farmer, and we're talking on prime time!"

The receptionist laughed and gave Dori a name. The book was mailed, read and returned in a week's time. Dori put the package under her bed without even looking at it, so sure it had been rejected.

"I left it under my bed for eight months; then I said, 'Well, I don't care if they didn't like my story.'"

When she did open it, she was surprised to find a full-page letter. When rejecting a book, publishing houses do not usually send long letters.

"It said: 'We're impressed with your writing,'" she remembers. "Then they said, 'You're simply writing the wrong book. You say that you're writing from your own experience, but for us it reeks of contrivance and melodrama. You're trying to dream up a lurid part that you think someone else will want to read.'"

Something about the story didn't ring true for them. The editors doubted very seriously if she'd ever lived the life of a sharecropper as she described it in the book.

And she hadn't.

They suggested that she look at her life as a peach farmer and that she write from her own experience. They told her not to give up--but, above all, continue writing.

"So I decided to keep my foot in the door."

She did keep her foot in the door and eventually sent Algonquin a partial manuscript for Clover. This time they called her back, to negotiate and sign contracts.

"When I first had my book accepted, my publisher gave me an advance to finish it. I was put under contract and paid in advance. I was so happy, I said, 'Can you believe this?'" She dances around clutching the invisible money. "Look at all these smackaroos! Then one day I told someone from New



York, and that person looked at me and said, 'Dori Sanders, you don't talk about money, do you?'"

"And I said, 'Yeeees! Yeeees!'"

"'You do?'"

"I said, 'Yes!'"

"And she said, 'Oh, Dori, don't you know it's a tad *gauche* to talk about money?'"

"I said, 'Not in South Carolina, it ain't.'"

Dori has plenty of plans for her money, including a new car--however, taxes and the family farm seem to take all she gets.

"The day I got my first check, the first tractor broke down. Next time, the second old tractor broke down. The next day we lost a peach crop. So, in the end, Orestus said, 'Oh, well, it's a good thing we wrote that book.' And that's where the money goes."

The fire is warm, but the conversation is hotter. Dori must sit up occasionally to have full movement of her hands and arms. The afternoon has almost fled away into darkness, but she continues to talk.

Dori's actual name is Dorenda Sanders. She swore as a child that if she ever became a woman she would cut her name in half. She did both.

"What's in a name?" Dori's sister Virginia asks as she enters the conversation.

"You're right," Dori agrees, "but I like the way certain names flow. When you're writing, you have to be name-conscious. If you're creating fiction, you want to be consistent with your characters. For example, if I'm doing a work of Southern fiction, I don't want to give them all Northern names," Dori asserts.

"In the South, if you're writing, you would want those double names to sort of go together, because that is what is most common. It's an easy flow if you keep the flow going that way."

"My character's name is Dizzy Mae," Virginia announces. She is working on her first novel.

"No, uh-uh, you didn't write that down. It didn't flow. Dizzy Mae doesn't flow smoothly," Dori corrects. "Dizzy something, yeah, but there was something else that worked really well."

Many who are familiar with York County may suspect that Clover's name came from the town of the same name, but Dori says she never considered it.

"A man came to the Peach Shed from New Jersey, and he had a dog named *Clovah*. I thought it was the most beautiful name I'd ever heard in my life."

When Dori asked the man how he spelled it, he told her it was spelled like a four-leaf clover.

"Oh, you mean *Clover*," she answered. "Then the idea for the name was in my head."

Darkness is almost omnipresent as Virginia leaves the room to "work on" dinner. Dori hasn't gotten up since 2 o'clock. It's bordering on 6 now, but she's not going to give up talking until she's finished. She places her fingers on her forehead, just below her hairline and pauses.

"I didn't want to stalemate on *Clover*," she begins. "I wasn't writing it for anyone necessarily. I was writing it so that a story I had could pour out onto the page. There was no stopping me," she confesses.

"This time," Dori continues, "I'm trying to second-guess what the critics might say, or what they might read into it, instead of just telling a story."

She describes *Her Own Place* as "just dreamy." The book, which chronicles the life of a Southern black woman, took her three years to write.

"I think I was trying too hard," she explains. "The problem was that nothing I was doing seemed right to me," she adds. "The first time around would have been better, you see, but nooooo. In my attempt to make it better, I think I lost some of my creativity."

Also contributing to the travail of her second novel were two instances that left her heartbroken and sad. Her first draft was lost at either the airport or on a plane; her second draft was thrown into the trash at a hotel by a careless housekeeper.

"I couldn't eat," she confesses, "it seemed as if I had lost a part of myself."

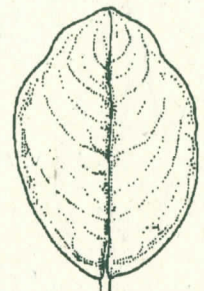
The new book has already received a rave review from *Book List*. Her second novel, which will be released in May, will send her on another book tour. She is currently working on a cookbook, and possibly a children's story—but she won't say for sure.

Her Own Place will definitely not be Dori Sanders' last book, but if she never wrote again, her life probably wouldn't change much.

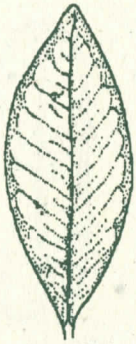
She gets up and walks you to your car, still talking on the way, perhaps about her upcoming workshops or about how good her crowder peas taste with her corn cakes. Maybe she's saying something about the Albertas that grow on the far side of the peach orchard.

She smiles as you say goodbye and gives you a friendly hug. She wishes you well and tells you to stop by anytime, that her door is always open. Virginia is in the kitchen making a lot of noise, probably dinner. The last remnants of sunshine fall over the trees to the west. Her voice is tireless. She waves her final goodbye and her image fades in the distance.

She is gone but not forgotten.



DVAL



ELLIPTIC

t w e n t y

N a m e s

By Sue Mullin

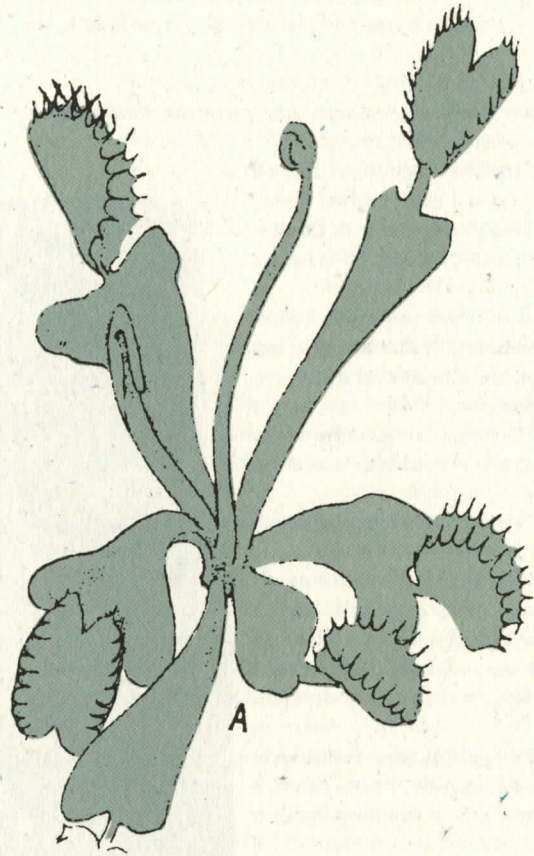
i am the mother of all sad
and i live on the edge of emotion
deep in the woods of feel

my home is light among shadows
my doors haven't any locks

unburdened semen weeps
silent tears from my vagina

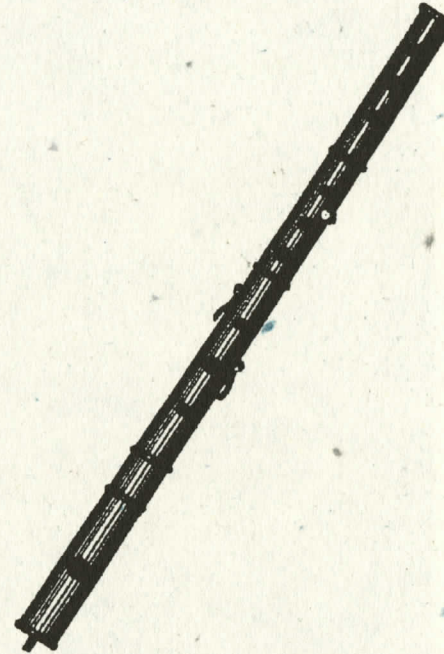
some call me whore
is your name john

too?



They walked down to the beach and lived beside the gulf
And by day, distant from the roadway's chuff
And the ghetto of gaza and the ghosts of yad vashem,
They bathed before their tent
And kneed allures of spray, and pitched stones,
And chased finned rainbows toward the arabs' net,
And pursued an ever extending crescent of surf,
That followed the deep riff of storm-tossed shells,
Which ribboned the sand below the crowding hills;
And by night, not leaping, not even in the enveloping dark,
They balanced on their heels, balanced on the crest,
And Astrid wove melodies with her rosewood flute
And exhumed wondrous ancient roots of words,
And they pissed into the pinpricked sea,
Whose phosphorescence glowed like stars,
And they slept outside, waking to a shore bird's sobs
And the bitterness of humiliated thought,
And struggled long against the flare of dawn,
And searched and fumbled and at last to burdens bent,
Still exalted by the sinking thought
That for the measure of an hour's downward tread,
As hard as stone, transcending fate,
They'd know what nothing meant.

Brief Suggestion of Camus' Sisyphus Smiling
By William Prather

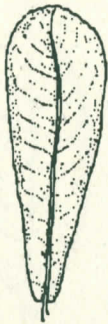


4

t w e n t y - o n e

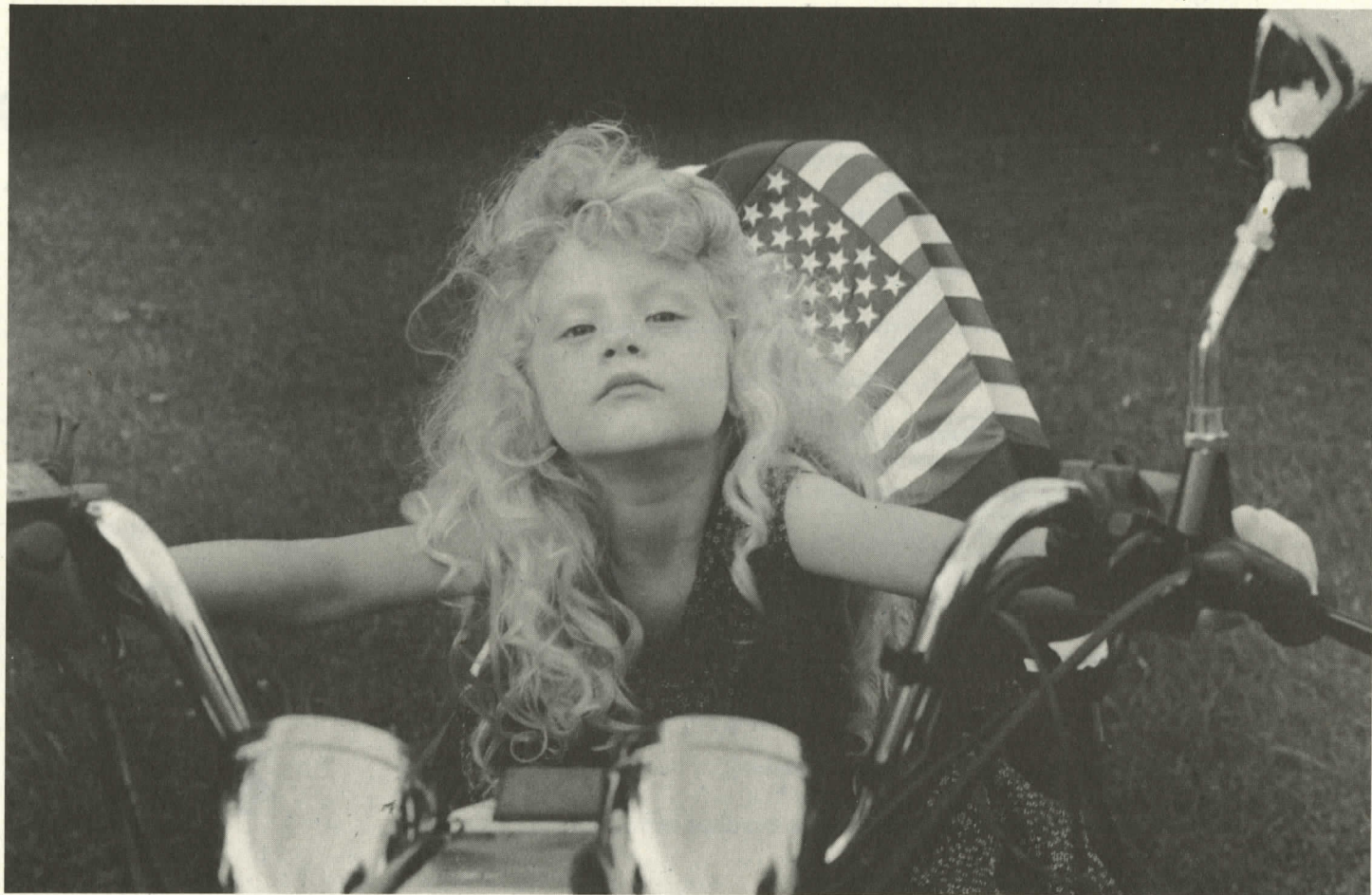


LANCEOLATE

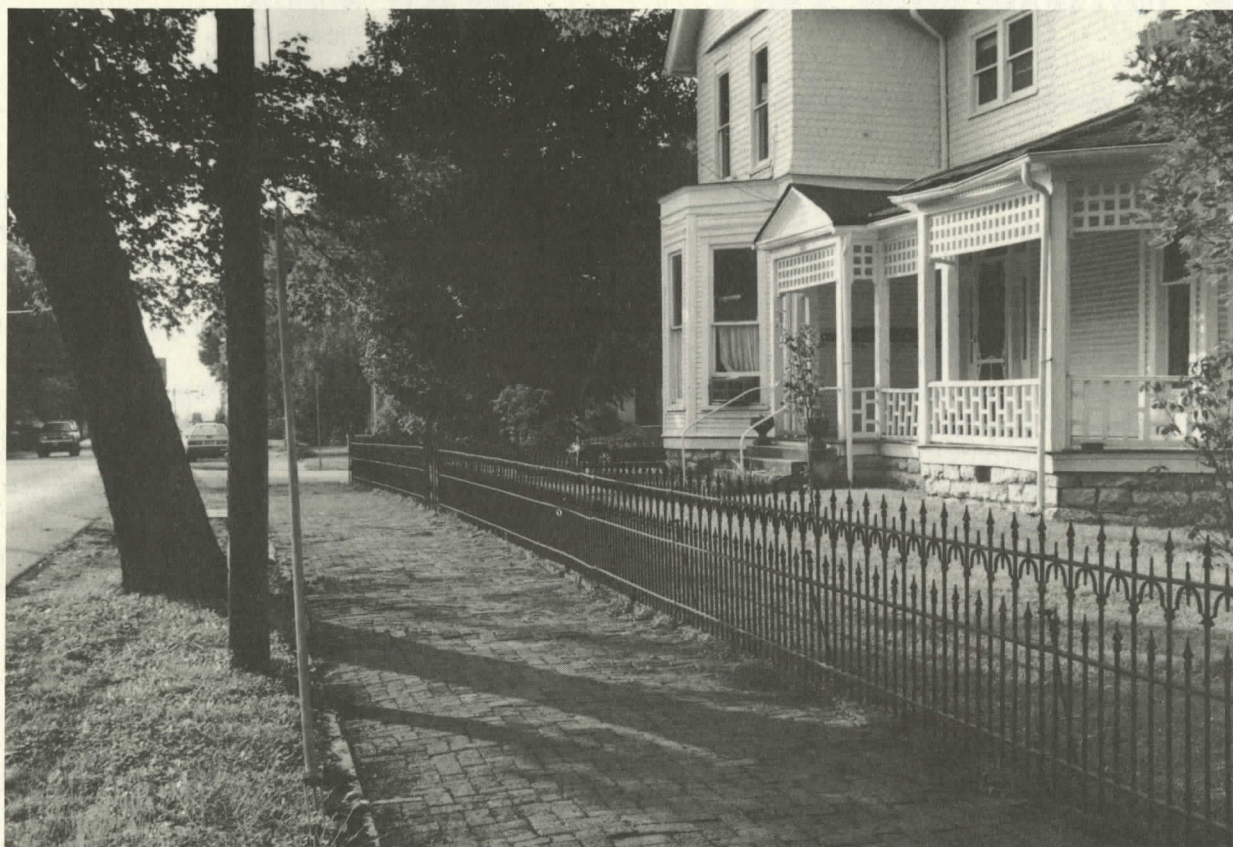


OBLANCEOLATE

t w e n t y - t w o

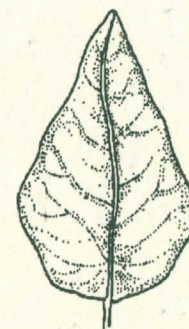


Michael Vilanova

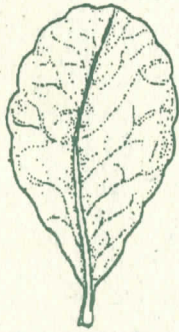


Brian Miller

twenty-three



OVATE



OBVATE

Entering the Diner, I sit next to Howard and fish a soggy pack of Winstons out of my shirt pocket and get one going. Howard nudges my knee with his. Seems like half the conversation between a man and woman in these parts is conducted with knees. A woman learns to listen, or ought to.

Howard's touch meant no more than a grunted howdy.

Willie Dee brings me a cup of coffee and large water, no ice, without my ordering. "How's the horse working?" he asks me.

"Fine."

"Too skittish," Howard warns. "You ought to have a mule."

"I know."

Arnie Meyers is there, eating S.O.S., three eggs over easy across the top, and sipping from a quart carton of milk he bought at Stoker's Market. "He'll kick your head in for you," Arnie predicts.

"Possibly."

Preston Nash is on the pay phone by the cigarette machine arguing with his woman. We eavesdrop for a while. He's sixty-three and his woman is twenty-seven. He leans heavily on his cane with both hands and pins the receiver to his ear with his shoulder. The rain starting must be getting to his legs again, I think. Preston pleads, offers to buy her a different second-hand car, threatens to whup her. Nothing new. Not much point in listening.

"You making a tobaccer crop this year?" Arnie asks me.

"Hell, yeah. You?"

"Hell, no. I got me a woman in Nashville. Ain't got the time," he brags.

"She better make good money, Arnie, much as you eat."

We all laugh.

Virgie shambles in, shaking rainwater off a cap with a Copenhagen tag on it. He doesn't dip or chew.

"Hit's a-rainin' out," he drawls and goes to the far end of the counter.

We laugh at him. He doesn't comprehend the touch of cruelty in it and grins back toothlessly.

"Seen Odell?" Howard asks Virgie.

"Yep."

"Whereabouts?"

"Co-op."

T.R.'s next man in. He sits by my other side. "If you ain't one sorry sight!" he tells me. His knee, meantime, invites me to the barn loft.

"Work in the rain til your horse bogged?"

"Yeah."

"Finish plowing?"

"Near about. You?"

"Near about," he replies.

"Seen Odell?" Howard asks T.R.

"He's at the Co-op," T.R. tells him.

"Hit's a-rainin'," Virgie says.

"How's your man doing?" T.R. asks me.

"Same."

"That lazy ass!" Howard slams his fist on the counter. "He only cut off his goddamned leg, not his goddamned head!"

"Easy," T.R. warns, his knee to mine, his arm coming around my shoulder.

"Shut up your face, Howard Gibson!" I whisper, looking him straight in the eye.

"If you was my woman, I'd give you an ass-whupping, talking to me like that," Howard glares.

"Jesus! Can't a man eat in peace?" Arnie complains.

"Hell, you done ate everything except the flowers off the plate," Willie Dee tells him.

Arnie rubs his belly and gets three dollars out of his right front pants pocket and lays it on the counter. Leaving, he tells us we spoiled his digestion.

Preston begins crying on the phone.

"Hit's a-rainin'," Virgie says.

"Fill up our cups!" Howard orders Willie Dee. "I want a clean cup!"

"I ain't your wife," Willie Dee says and starts down the counter refilling our cups.

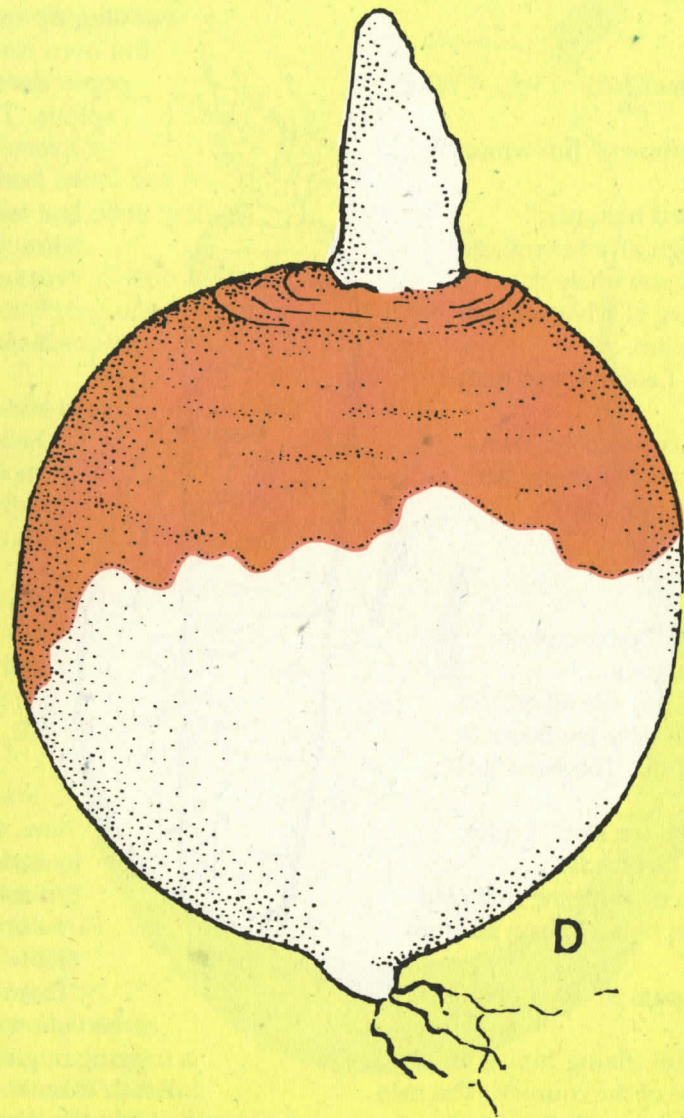
Preston hangs up the phone and shuffles to the door. He can't pick up his feet any more.

"Get it all fixed?" T.R. asks him.

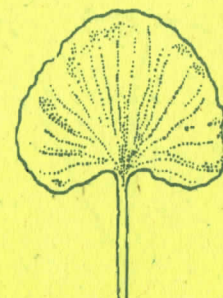
"She wants a blue car now. She don't like the green one no more."

T.R. holds the door to help Preston out and Jim and Leon come in. They're builders. Good ones. They're putting a wheelchair ramp into the courthouse. There's no elevator once inside and the halls are too narrow to ever get a chair to the

SUSTENANCE

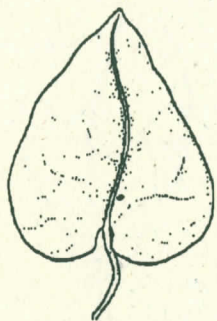


twenty-five



RENIFORM

By Sue Mullin



CORDATE

restrooms, but the County Commissioners voted for the ramp anyway. It'd look better, if a politician were to ever come down from Nashville. We're more up, but we all call it down from Nashville.

Jim supports one hand in a bloody rag.

T.R. moves down one stool for Jim to sit by me. Jim slides in, the length of his leg firm against mine. His leg is seeking comfort.

"God damn Leon," he moans.

Willie Dee brings a dish towel full of ice. "What happened?" he asks.

"Leon smacked me with the hammer!" Jim winces in pain.

"Leon smacked me with the God damned hammer!"

Leon laughs. Leon would laugh at a funeral, not meaning any harm. He just laughs. He can't help it.

"If you would have been looking at what we was doing, you could have moved," he tells Jim.

"You were driving the spike, Leon. I was just holding the board!"

"It's not my fault Emmie Lou walked by then.

"Oh God," Howard moans "Emmie's doing her tee-shirt walk in the rain. Is she coming our way?"

"Not yet," Leon says.

"No bra," Jim moans.

"All tit," T.R. adds.

"She does it on purpose," Willie Dee complains.

"I know. I know!" Jim howls in pain.

I take the dirty rag off Jim's hand. We all crowd around, studying his finger, deciding finally the break is clean, the bone not splintered anywhere. The bone juts from his twisted finger.

"I can run you over to the city to the Doc," I offer.

"Just make me better, Mama," he pleads.

I shrug, packing his finger in ice. With the first cold the pain is pretty bad. Willie Dee gives him a Mason jar from under the counter.

"Good rye," he says. We all pass it. Rye's better than corn.

Then the men settle around Jim, fixing him with good handholds and I move to the other side of the counter. The men grip Jim hard and Willie Dee stands by with the rye handy. Gripping the end of the broken finger, I pull it out slow and steady until the bones come in line.

Jim commences to scream.

When he's still again, he takes more of the rye whiskey Willie Dee's holding to him. I repack the finger in ice to stop new blood that's started coming after the set. Then we all examine our pocket knives and select the point we thing is best and sterilize it over the propane gas burner beside the grill. The fingernail needs boring. It's smashed and blood is building up underneath. Jim sits still for this part on his own and Howard and Willie Dee eat grape popsicles from the cooler so I can have the sticks for splints. T.R. goes out to his truck and returns with a livestock medical kit. When the nail is bored, we sterilize a large-needle cow syringe with rye and load it with combiotic. After giving Jim the shot, I douse his finger with bitter-smelling rust-colored livestock iodine.

"Shit! Oh, shit!" Jim bellers and stomps his boots.

That finishes it and I splint and bandage the finger. Jim lays his bandaged hand on my cheek and kisses me on the mouth. The other men whoop so we take a while, enough time for me to horde the flavors of him in memory.

"Your old man's coming, Baby," Howard taunts me.

I flip him a birdie. Jim is still thanking me.

"Don't never say that unless it's true," T.R. warns Howard.

"Hit's a-rainin' out," Virgie says.

I tell Jimmy with my knee that I love him. His eyes tell me gently he knows, and he likes me a lot, but not that much.

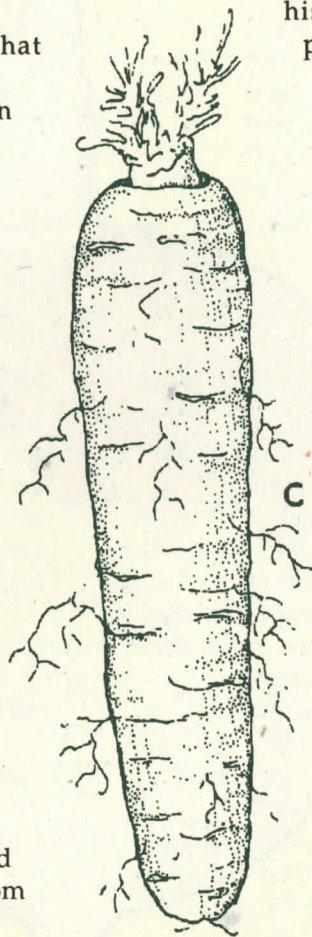
Jim and Leon go out into the rain again. Keith Farris comes in and takes the seat Jim just left.

"How's the road doing?" T.R. asks him.

"Damn rain," Keith replies. "I got a construction deadline, state inspectors on my ass, and a friggging mudslide."

Keith's knee asks me if it will be soon. My knee promises him. We don't speak otherwise.

Bullard pulls into the middle of the parking lot and stops his truck. He tips a beer can up draining it, and drops it



out the open window. Staggering out to the front of his truck, leaning against it for support, he takes a leak. We watch him.

"Drunk three days this time," Willie Dee supplies.

"More like four," Howard argues.

I stand up to leave. Bullard isn't nice when he's drunk. T.R. hugs me. I don't pay for my coffee. There's no need. One of the men will.

"If you see Odell," Howard says, "tell him I'm here."

I nod.

"Hit's a-rainin' out," Virgie tells me.

"It surely is, Virgie," I reply.

It's dusk when I get to the farm and I feed and water the stock before going to the house. A pan and plate in the sink let me know my husband has already eaten.

Going back out, I carry in two five gallon buckets of water from the spring pope, emptying one into shallow pans on the stove to boil and dumping the other one into the tub.

Watching me, my husband asks, "Been to the Diner?"

"Yeah."

"Can't understand why you go there," he whines.

I shrug.

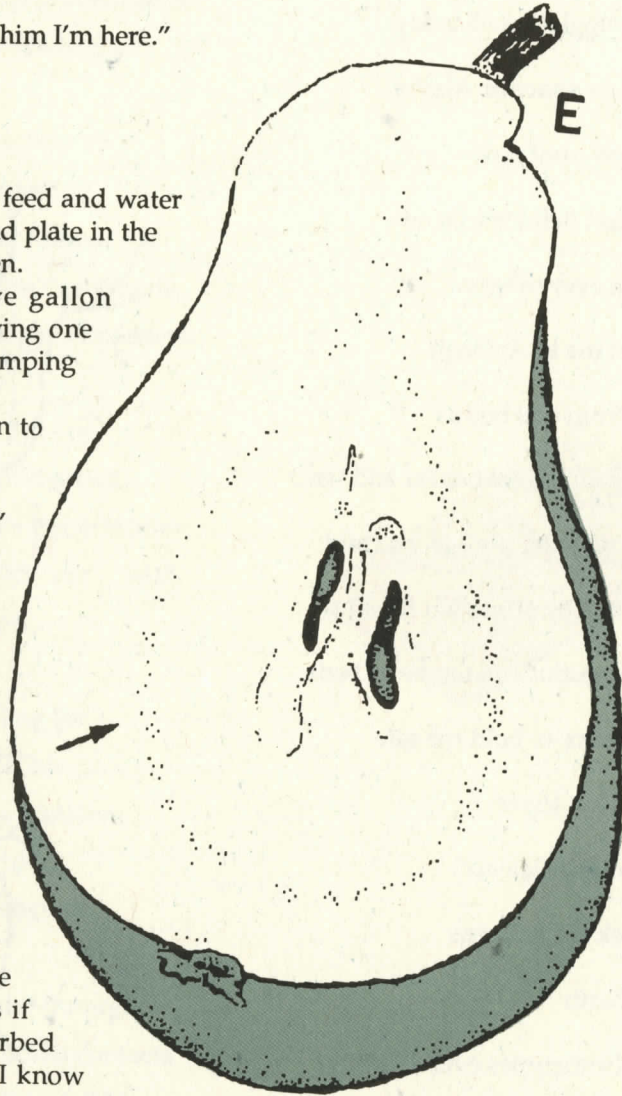
"They bore the hell out of me," he says. "Same thing all the time. Howard looking for Odell, nobody got their plowing done before the rain, and Virgie sitting there saying it's raining."

"Same thing."

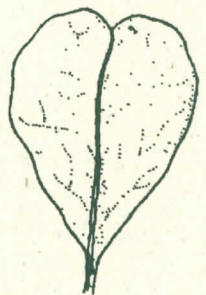
"And that bit of conversation took all afternoon," he says bitterly.

I carry the hot water to my tub when it's ready and he goes to bed. Later, when my bath is over, I move through the familiar darkened rooms to my side of the bed. The boundaries of my side are a well-defined as if they were staked out with twelve-gauge barbed wire fence. We don't speak or touch though I know he's still awake. That would be as treacherous as crossing a dry gulch straddle-deep with flood waters. But I'm okay, touch warm and filled.

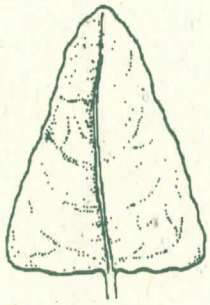
I listen. It's still raining out.



t w e n t y - s e v e n



BCORDA*



DELTOID

twenty-eight

Winter echoes in my elbows and knees
Though the calendar sings early September
And the thermometer struggled to 85 today
The night is chill, like outer space or Alaska
Two places I will never go—not now
Time flows swiftly; my feet itch for Ireland
Not enough life left to go everywhere
But maybe enough to get me to Armagh
There will be no babies from this body

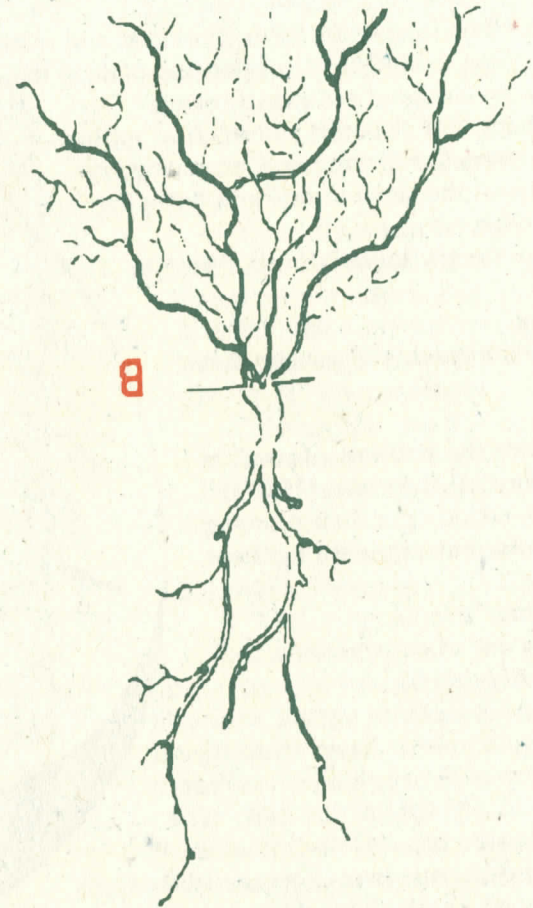
(sadness echoes far and wee)

Leaving me comfort in cuddling my sister's child
Singing god-songs and unicorns into her dreams
Perhaps I will always sleep alone in too-large beds
No arms to console, no voice to hold me safe
In the long, cold winters left to me
But I look within and find sufficiency
I am a circle; my feet seek the patterns
Barefooted I touch the Earth

(sometimes even in snow)

And I can stand the cold, be content
Even when Winter echoes in my elbows

W I N T E R S O N G
By Debbie Gayle Rose



Remember the time you lost the Cabbage?
Maybe your cousin Fred took it, and
Stored it in a great tomb of Emerald,
Where only Camels fly and Turkish Robbers
Send out for Chinese Tofu Sandwiches.

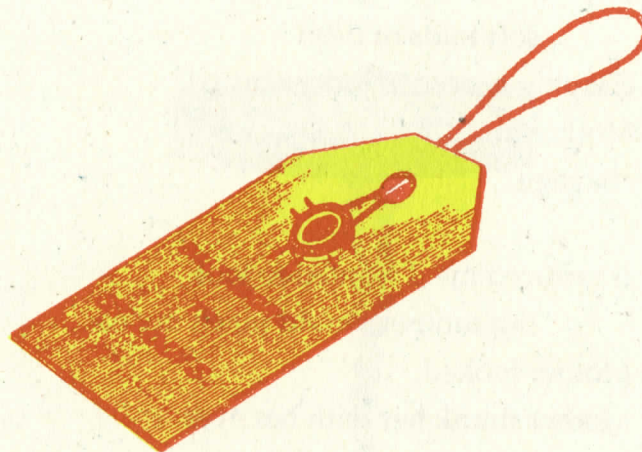
Cool-Joe stands alone, waiting for PBS
To replay the one on Auschwitz—if
Only he were there. Forget the Alamo—
Those damn French-Texans don't eat bagels,
Only croissants. I hate those Bayou-Deserters,

Cool-Joe slept with one once. But one
Still night, while the March wind shook
The protein from the Red Ant's humble home,
Your cousin Fred ate the Cauliflower ... with
A fork! Continue does Cool-Joe,

Sun-bathing in Bermuda, waiting for
Jeff Goldblum to sweep him off his
Lonesome feet and offer him a Winston;
But only using a Bic Lighter can
He be aware of Death's messenger—

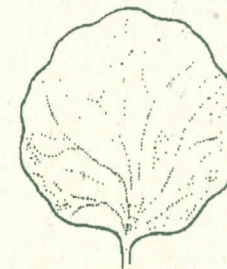
The arrogant French-Texan, who through
Kaleidoscope eyes and rose-colored contacts
Can he deliver his campaign slogan; "Your
Insurance Is Due, Mister Iguana Sleeps Late."
So much for cheesy ex-lovers from nowhere.

TRAVELS BY G. (PRELUDE #2)
By George Anthony Popovich

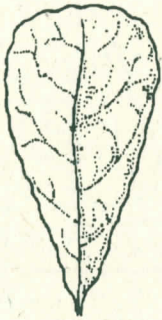


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ORBICULAR



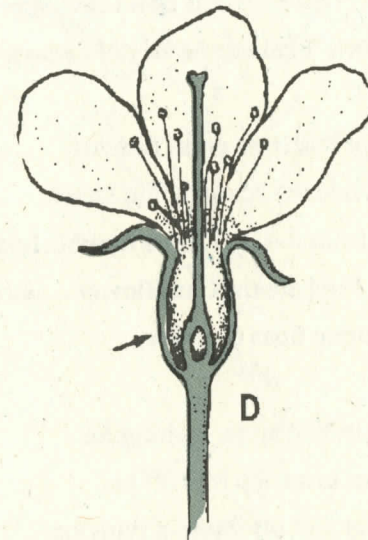
SPATULATE

t h i r t y

"Mother, look, I can see that woman's—"
She yanked hard on my ear,
 turned my head around.
But mother looked at that brown woman, closely,
tan smooth breast
small lips drinking it
tiny hands, tiny fingernails, pink
 soft folds of flesh
clasping a smooth brown breast.
Mother said,
"Savage."

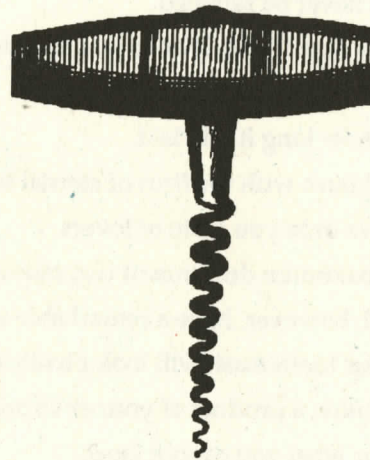
It tortured me. I wanted to look
 but mother would pinch my ear.
Mother looked.
Mother drank her with her eyes
and it didn't taste good
 to her.
The bus was quiet
and I could hear the soft slurp-slurg
of tiny lips and tiny kitten tongue.
and I wished hard
 to be savage.

S a v a g e
By Lauri Beasley



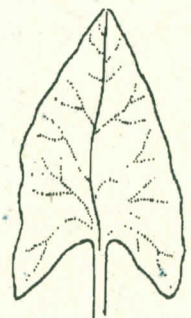
No! Don't touch me there.
You know I can't say no.
Back off! You're too close.
Your emptiness burns my soul.
Makes me want to feel the muscles in your back
so smooth and perfect-
ripple, tense, relax
under my hands exploring, caressing.
Don't look at me that way.
Your bedroom eyes—surface eyes
they echo, imitate my love.
They make me want you, need you
to need me, to love me.
But you can't, don't know how.
Someone else took you, all of you, hurt you.
Not me.
I tried to find you.
Let me find you, show you
teach you...
Let me pretend you learned.

U n t i t l e d
By Samantha Mullin

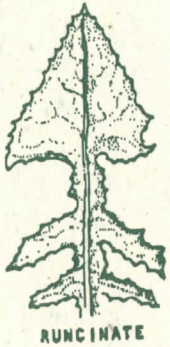


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t h i r t y - o n e



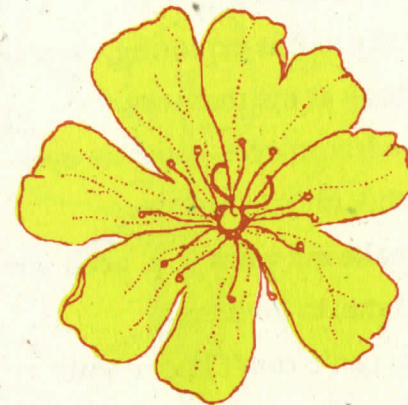
SAGITTATE



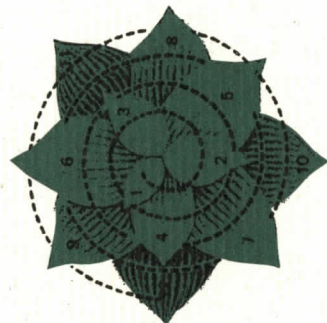
thirty-two

Tonight I had the most powerful religious experience.
God spoke to me.
And He said unto me:
"My child,
you are condemned to a life of unhealthy relationships,
poor judgment and cellulite.
You are condemned to a life of eternal wanting,
you will be saddled with emotions impossible to decipher,
you will never be satisfied.
And if by some freak chance you are happy
you are condemned to question why,
and for how long it will last.
You will burn with the fires of eternal sexual frustration,
and I give unto you a life of lovers
with a maximum duration of two minutes.
You will, however, have a remarkable sex drive
even your toothbrush will look phallic to you.
You are now a product of your environment,
yearn for what you cannot label,
place labels on what you cannot make sense of,
make sense of very little.
I hereby condemn you to a life of eternal self-doubt, longing,
and searching.
Though there are no answers
you will live in hope of finding just one."

Religious Experience
By Lauri Beasley



C O L L A G E



S P R I N G

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