Kudzu

a digital quarterly magazine

Premiere Issue

Including:

Fiction by Richard Cumyn

Poetry by John L. Moore,

D. Edward Deifer & more

Issue 95/1 • Spring 1995

Kudzu

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Kudzu is a digital magazine dedicated to bringing you the best in fiction, poetry, and essays. We strive to present fresh and original works that challenge us and our readers to think about the world, each other, and ourselves.

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Submissions of fiction, poetry, andessays may be sent to the magazine via Internet email at <kudzu@etext.org>. Files should be sent in one of two formats (listed in order of preference): a compressed, binhex'd Macintosh word processor file, sent in the body of the email message; plain ASCII. For submissions of art, please contact the Editor to work out a suitable format. For more information, request the *Kudzu Writer's Guidelines* via email or via WWW (URL below).

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Kudzu 95/1 was composed in Times with most heads being different width and weight variations of Helvetica. Kudzu was created with Apple Macintosh computers using Adobe PageMaker 5.0, Illustrator 5.0, Photoshop 2.5, Acrobat 2.0, MicroFrontier ColorIt! 3.0, and Claris MacWrite Pro .5. Additional text editing was done using TexEdit 2.5 and BBEdit Lite 3.0. HTML markup and conversion for the World Wide Web (WWW) version was done using BBEdit Lite 3.0 with BBEdit HTML Tools v1.2 by Lindsey Davies, GIFConverter 2.3.7, Graphic Converter 1.7.8/11, and Transparency.

Works that influenced the creation of *Kudzu* 95.1 were: Tom Waits, *The Heart of Saturday Night;* Better Than Ezra, *Deluxe;* Big Star, *Columbia;* Lyle Lovett, *Pontiac;* the Police, *Ghost in the Machine;* Tom Petty, *Wildflowers;* Live, *Throwing Copper;* the Jayhawks, *Tomorrow the Green Grass;* Coca-Cola Classic, Dr. Pepper, Twizzlers (strawberry, natch), Brachs Starlight mints, and good food from Proud Larry's in Oxford, MS and Hugo's in Fayetteville, AR.

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Off the Vine

Steven W. Jarvis

As anyone growing up or even just passing through, the South can tell you, kudzu covers s anyone growing up or even just passing through, the South can tell you, kudzu covers *everything.* In fact, it's rumored that if you stand still too long during the summer, you'll get covered up, too. It occurred to me that the Internet is a lot like kudzu: it is growing fast-faster than anyone ever anticipated- and it is starting to spread and cover anything that stands still long enough for a home computer and a modem to sprout there. Though kudzu is now considered an invader in most of the places it grows, it defines the Southern landscape, and the Internet is similar: it is already beginning to define the informationscape of not just the South or America but the whole world. Unfortunately, it is also viewed by some as a noxious intrusion of technology into modern life; in fact, some folks are downright afraid of it (some folks are afraid of kudzu, too; check out James Dickey's poem "Kudzu"). We hope that our *Kudzu* will spread with the same exuberance that kudzu and the net have, but with only the good effects.

Kudzu was conceived and born as an electronic magazine. Electronic publishing is inexpensive (if you've got the hardware, software, and net connection already), and it gives a publisher access to a readership that reaches far, far beyond what a self-published little journal or magazine could reach. Though it occupies only a very small niche in the publishing world, electronic publishing is growing in leaps and bounds. We at *Kudzu* want to be among the first magazines (there are many here already) to present excellent, challenging, and vital writing to the world's reader through electronic media.

We're not in this for money (though we'll gladly accept donations); we're in this to open avenues to publication for good writers and poets, writers whose work challenges us to think about our world, each other, and ourselves. As writers and artists ourselves, we know how hard it is to find an audience for one's work. I myself have an overflowing folder stuffed with rejections, but I also have a few precious acceptances that make those rejection slips nearly disappear. We have created *Kudzu* to be a forum where emerging writers and poets can present their work to an audience.

In this first issue of the magazine, we have a mix of ourselves, our friends, and people we've met only through the net. Somehow, I think that's fitting, and I imagine that the work we publish (and thus the magazine itself) will become far more diverse in form and subject matter. As far as the works in this issue go, I think we have some really strong examples of new writing. The long short story, "Empty Harvest," by Blake Wilson (who has joined our staff as "Editor-At-Large" only recently) is remeniscent of writers from Faulkner to Cormac McCarthy, yet is wholly Wilson as well. And, if I had to pick one piece that really strikes me, John Moore's poem "Little Sansbois Creek" is it. John's poetry is a marvelous blend of traditional poetic forms (if you look close, you'll realize that both of these poems are sonnets) and non-traditional subject matter-mixing concrete for a foundation ("Constructions") and trotline fishing for catfish ("Little Sansbois Creek"). I expect we'll see more poetry from John in the future.

In coming issues we will have the serialization of a first novel-a western, in fact, not something you'd necessarily expect to see on the net-as well as short fiction, poetry, and essays and articles from writers and poets across the net and beyond.

This first issue of *Kudzu* showcases some local (for us) talent; mostly written by friends or ourselves, it is the first step of a long journey. Join us.

Steven W. Jarvis

Wheatbread Gets His Say

Among many other things, the Internet opens up lines of communication between people who probably would not have the opportunity to connect in any other way. It has come far from its roots, and every day more people are becoming a part of it and more independent loci of discourse are cropping up: from the absurd to the completely practical.

The purpose of *Kudzu* is to present a selection of fiction, poetry, essays, and reviews in a format that has advantages over a conventional magazine format, besides the fact that you don't have to drive across town and pay some of your hard earned-money for a copy. The greatest of these is that the magazine itself exists on the net where it can easily be accessed from across the world, without having to deal with the costs of printing, distribution, transportation, and all of the other things that a conventional print magazine involves. And ease of publication and reading isn't the half of it: a scathing letter to the editor, a kind comment, or an article or story submission is as easy as sending email.

Many of the writers in this issue are from my current home town, Fayetteville, Arkansas. I'd like to thank them for their efforts. I am sure many of them will contribute work to future issues as well, but there has been (and is) no effort to privilege writers from any specific locale. The gap between the idea of fashioning Kudzu into a web 'zine and its fruition was a short one, so we relied on writers close at hand, and they have served us very well. Now that *Kudzu* is a reality, we hope to receive and publish submissions from all over the web.

We hope that you will find something in every issue of *Kudzu* that you like—for whatever reason—or at the very least prods you to think about the piece.

James E. "Wheatbread" Martin

The Genetic Theory

Steven W. Jarvis

I am a great admirer of the female form. Or so I think I am. Breasts, tits, ass, thighs, calves, feet, arms, fingers, toes, eyes, lips. I love the eyes of women, large and brown, or almond and green, and the hidden thoughts that some think are so different from men's and my own. I've often watched from my porch or window, or my car window women walking by, especially the young sorority girls, arms swinging, hair bouncing, asses twitching as they strut in their own insulated Walkman worlds. But not just those young, tight, tanned-in-winter girls. Also women who walk hurriedly to work or wherever, faces pinched and worried about children or home or their sister who is beaten by her drunk husband, or relaxed and carefree, secure.

I admire how they move and the textures, the many variegations of their skin. I imagine, if only vaguely and idealistically, how that skin might feel. Elastic and warm and dry. Cold and prickly if they are cold and swept by icy winds in the winter.

Even their hair holds my interest. How it looks as they casually swing their heads around or nervously tuck it behind one ear and then the other. How right Frost was to be fascinated by the young women who throw their long hair forward to dry as they kneel. I remember seeing one of my sister's roommates do that one humid summer night as she got ready to go out. Her long form, kind of skinny, tucked into an "s" shape, blonde hair forward, exposing the dark layers underneath and the soft, fuzzy curls at the nape of her neck. I was fascinated, nearly mesmerized at the sight, oblivious to the other people in the room and their conversation.

I WAS FASCINATED, NEARLY MESMERIZED AT THE SIGHT OF HER, OBLIVIOUS TO THE OTHER PEOPLE IN THE ROOM AND THEIR CONVERSATION...

It is not, however, this appreciation (though some, including the doctors here, call it obsession) that lead me to commit the heinous acts for which I was convicted. I really don't think so, anyway. It's more about society, and the rules and seemingly natural laws that govern human interaction. I remember, in a college biology class, learning about sociobiology. The professor, an admirer of the female form himself, caught in a tent at a party in a field with a young student, he nearly 50 and she but eighteen (he lost his tenure for that), seemed so excited by the possibility (no, fact) that our actions, our desires, our every thought are controlled by genes. if we find a woman attractive it is that long-ingrained truth embedded in our genetic code that tells us "She would make beautiful children for you," and they insist upon a child from you and her in which to continue their existence.

If our genes, now seeming conscious, driven things, even beings in their own way, determine what we find attractive, it is they who determine whom we are allowed to have. Perhaps this knowledge caused the fear in me, that me, in my socially (and perhaps, genetically) determined unattractiveness (short, overweight bad skin, halfway bald at 32, large nose, thin, nearly white hair), would not be found suitable by those young beautiful creatures that walk to the beat and their genes that search for beautiful genes in men to share the eventual host of their making. That is what I feared. Not that these girls and women would independently find me unappealing, crass, inarticulate, but that it was predetermined by their genes, the secret puppet masters, that I and my inferior genes were unacceptable to them. So unacceptable I was (am), that they often seemed to not notice me, their genes taking in my form before they themselves could, distracting their attention toward anything else before she might think, "He might be nice to me. Treat me well, make me laugh. Cook spaghetti so I don't have to."

Those genes. Looking through those shining, moist big brown eyes and judging my genes (hidden from our view, but obvious to their eyes) inferior. Not good enough. not even close enough to try. I blame them for my crimes. And my own genes, they are to blame. They made me do it. They saw the rejection before I saw the indifference, they saw the truth, the sad, eternal genetic (and thus, truer) truth: that my genes would not be fit enough to inhabit the next level of vessel with them. It was my genes that caused the fear and loathing and desire and madness in my head and heart and gut. They caused me to take revenge for their sake, to assuage their need for survival. For, if the other genes could be eliminated, it left fewer others to compete with those who inhabit me. If you can't beat the opposition, eliminate them. That is their rule. But even they know that unacceptable is unacceptable. Reject. Wrong. Bad. They take petty revenge, and mask it as survival.

They are more like us that most people, even so-called experts, would admit. They're not just driven toward existing forever, beyond each host, looking to combine with newer and better genes each time to produce better (more attractive) vessels to carry them on to even greater heights. To immortality.

And now here I sit with no window to look out of, no chance to catch a glimpse of possibility, of potential, of immortality. I have only pale yellow walls, meant to sooth me,

but they only infuriate my genes, and thus me, for my genes can produce those chemical effects we like to lie to ourselves about and call emotions. This thin, hard bed, the only furniture except for a lidless toilet. Not even a mirror, or a table, or a chair. Only speckled linoleum floors, brown blanket and dingy white sheets, and yellow walls. Unattractive. Unacceptable. Wrong.

They know they should not be here, that this incarceration is wrong. They need to be out there, looking for partners who want to build magnificent vessels to share into the future, to be immortal together. They know they will be in here for a while, their current, unacceptable vessel aging, growing pale and even more unattractive by the hour. They try to work toward the quickest release. They are kind (and therefore, so am I) to the nurses (male, of course, and always in pairs) and to the doctors twice a week. They lie, and say that they are sorry for what they did. They are not. They smile ferociously, even as I smile winningly, falsely. They want to be free, to continue the search, the hunt. I answer all of the questions with their answers, and won't let me tell the doctors about them. They don't want to be discovered, to have their truth revealed to other genes.

I want them to be revealed, to cast the light of truth, of knowledge upon their existence, so that I can be free. Free of their control, free of this room, this cell (even though they do not call them "cells" here, as I am constantly reminded by the smiling staff). If I can tell the doctors about them, I will be released. I will be able to live out my life under my control. I know I will. If I can just trick them long enough to tell about them, about how they control me. If I reveal them to the others, they will shrivel and grow silent, and give up the fight, freeing me from the thoughts.

They especially hate the genes of the smiling, handsome doctor. Those genes are old and have a vessel that will insure their immortality. The doctor has granted their wish three times, it appears, from the pictures on his office wall. With two other vessels of equal beauty. My genes are jealous. Two! Mine want only one, they have accepted that they may get only one chance, and they want to fight for it, so they force me to smile and nod and be repentant when I do not feel like smiling or agreeing or to be repentant. They know, and they want to remove the doctor. His genes are the enemy, they are greedy and have taken more that their fair share! They must be eliminated. But, my genes are crafty and ever self-preserving. They do not attempt to remove the opposition, the rival genes. For, if they did, they know that they would not ever get to create another vessel. And that keeps their violence in check. Only that. But one day, and one day soon, from what the smiling, former halfback doctor says (not that we believe him for a minute), they will be free to hunt once more.

Empty Harvest

Blake Wilson

Virgil sat before the hearth, watching the fire slowly fade and settle into coals as his father's voice filled the room from behind as it had done every night in Virgil's memory. "God drove them out of paradise, Boy, even though they didn't know they was sinning," his father said. "They didn't know that snake was the devil, but that don't matter to God. His love and judgment is hard and cruel, He don't take no excuses for sinning. If you want to live right, you got to live by His law, and it's so plain and true that there ain't nobody who can't say they don't know it." The life hissed out of the back log and its light flared before it fell into the smoldering pile. His father continued. "It don't matter to God that you didn't know your sin, Virgil. It was committed, and you've got to win your redemption." Virgil sat up on his haunches and picked up the poker. He stirred the coals with it, drawing the last of their warmth to fight off the February chill. His father's chair scraped against the floor as the man rose and came to the hearth, standing beside Virgil as he placed the worn Bible back on its place on the mantel. "You best get to bed, Boy, if you're to help me get the team ready tomorrow. It's a long drive and I aim to get an early start."

Virgil rose and returned the poker to its place. He then moved to his bed and removed his clothes. He pulled the nightshirt over his head and crawled between the blankets, holding himself rigid until his heat filled the space. His father did the same, removing his black broadcloth coat and pants and placing them on his chair before easing his weight unto the rough, sturdy frame of the bed which he had made with his own hands. Virgil lay staring at the rough rafters as the sound of his father's steady breathing filled the air. After a time the sound diminished, and Virgil was left to his thoughts. His father was making the two-day trip to Helena, the county seat, the next day to purchase seed for the upcoming year's cotton crop. In years past, Virgil had made the trip with him, but this year he would remain at the farm. There was a new field which still had stumps to be pulled, and Virgil would begin this work while his father was gone. This was also the first year that the man found Virgil old enough to be left alone, though he was sixteen and had been doing the bulk of the farm work for two years.

The only times that Virgil had been away from his father were when he was in the fields alone and the days that he had spent attending the rural school during the past three winters. His father had allowed him to attend school so that he could learn how to read enough to study the Bible on his own, someday, and to learn how to write. The rest of Virgil's life had been spent with his father. He had no memory of his mother. His father had told him that she had died giving birth to him. His father told him that she had died because of Virgil's sin, the sin that he had been born with as all people are. It was this sin that caused Virgil's father to take him from his birthplace in Missouri and take him on the long road down the Mississippi into Arkansas. He must live in isolation, his father had said, so that he could spend his life in coarse labor to repent for this black scar on his soul.

> HIS FATHER TOLD HIM THAT MEMPHIS WAS SINFUL IN ITS DISPLAYS OF RICHES, IN ITS SALOONS AND HOUSES WHERE FALLEN WOMEN TRAPPED MEN IN THEIR FLESH…

Virgil lay awake, listening to his father's quiet breathing and the sound of the wind moaning in the barren trees. The last feeble light faded from the coals as he searched his memory. His life in Missouri came to him in the disjointed shapes of the young. He recalled a barn that was so immense that he was terrified to go into it and grass that reached to his waist, pulling at him as he tried to keep pace with his father. His first vivid memory was of the trip to Arkansas. He remembered Memphis towering above the bluffs across the river and how his father told him that the city was sinful in its display of wealth, in its saloons and houses where fallen women trapped men in their flesh. He remembered watching the city radiate its brilliance in the setting sun until it was hidden by the great curves in the river. He remembered making camp along the river until his father agreed to lease this farm from Edward Milner, whose own farm lay adjacent to this, stretching through some of the finest soil in the Delta. Since that time he had worked the land with his father. In the beginning he walked silently behind his father, waiting for a command for water or food. During the harvest he pulled a small cotton sack behind him, filling it with the soft mounds which he ripped from the plants, cutting his fingers. These early memories filled his mind until sleep overtook him, the last image the radiance of the condemned city.

The sound of logs being placed in the hearth and the faint tinge of smoke woke Virgil before dawn the next morning. The cold quickly drove the sleep from his head and he rose, dressing rapidly to preserve his heat. "The fire is stoked, Boy. Get the food ready while I see to the mules," his father said to him before leaving the room. Virgil took the iron skillet down

from its place on the wall and placed some cured ham in it. He held it over the growing flames until it sizzled, filling the air with its heavy scent. Virgil had the meal prepared and was pouring thick coffee, the only luxury his father afforded them, into tin mugs when the man returned. They ate the meat with cold biscuits and drank the hot, oily liquid in silence. After the meal, Virgil followed his father to the barn. The day was dawning gray and chill as he led the mule to the wagon and hitched it up. "I will be gone four days, Boy. You take the other mule and start pulling them stumps. I reckon you can get half that field cleared before I get back," his father said as he climbed into the wagon. He lifted a black, flat-brimmed hat from the seat next to him and pulled it firmly onto his head. His hard eyes scanned the farmyard and field, finally coming to rest on Virgil. "Just because I'm gone don't mean you don't have to work. God will watch you without me here. You understand me, Boy?"

Virgil looked up at his father's grim face. "Yes, Sir," he said quietly. The man grunted and slapped the reins against the mule's flank. The wagon jerked as he turned it toward the road which led past Milner's farm and on to Helena. Virgil watched until it passed out of sight, then returned to the house. He cleared the table of their breakfast and prepared for the day's work. He left the house and went to the barn. There he gathered the necessary tools and threw a harness over the remaining mule. The sky had turned a lighter shade of gray when Virgil led the animal to the new field. He hitched it to a stump. Taking a shovel, he dug the cold, black earth from around the roots, then commanded the mule to pull. As the animal raised the stump from the earth's grasp, Virgil swung an axe into the roots that the soil would not give up, sending mud and frigid water into the air. After countless hours he wedged the axe under the stump to secure it and produced a hard biscuit from his pocket. He stood in the drizzle which had been falling for some time and ate his meager meal. After finishing it, he returned to his task. The sunless sky was growing dim when the stump was freed from its hold. Virgil unhitched the animal from its burden and slowly drove it home.

HE STOOD IN THE DRIZZLE WHICH HAD BEEN FALLING FOR SOME TIME AND ATE HIS MEAGER MEAL. AFTER FINISHING IT, HE RETURNED TO HIS TASK...

The house and barn came into view as Virgil topped the last rise. In the yard a wagon hitched to two horses stood. Two people sat in the seat, watching him as he approached. As Virgil drew nearer, he recognized the man as Edward Milner. Seated next to him was his daughter, Faye. Virgil had attended the rural school with her and had seen her at the Milner farm when he had gone with his father to pay the year's rent. He had not seen her since last September, and he noticed that she had grown some in that time. Virgil tied the mule to a tree and approached the wagon. "Your Father asked me to come by and see that you were doing all right while he was gone, Virgil. There ain't much doing at our place so I thought I'd come by today," the man said in a gentle voice. "You know my daughter, Faye, don't you, Virgil?"

"Yes, Sir. We went to school, together," Virgil answered. "Afternoon, Miss Milner," he said to the girl, bowing his head.

"Virgil," she replied, peering out from underneath the quilted bonnet which protected her head from the weather. Her cheeks were flushed from the cold and her blue eyes shone in sharp contrast to her skin.

"Had any luck with those stumps today?," Milner asked as he pulled the collar of his coat close to ward off the chill.

"Yes, Sir. I just got one, today, but the rest might go easier," Virgil answered as he looked from Milner to Faye.

"They'll come out quicker when this ground thaws, if it ever does," Milner said as he scanned the sky. "Well, we better be getting back before it gets too dark. Seems like you're getting along all right, but you come get us if there's any trouble."

"I will," Virgil said as Milner released the wagon's brake and steered the horses around. "Goodbye, Mr. Milner, Miss Milner."

"Goodbye, Virgil," Milner said as he led the horses out of the yard and toward the road. Virgil watched as the wagon's wheels found the ruts that would take it home. As her father slapped the reins onto the horses' backs, Faye turned and lifted her small hand. A slight smile formed on her lips as she waved. Virgil stared at her face and delicate hand, then raised his own and waved in return. Faye turned back around and Virgil stood watching them until they passed out of view.

The drizzle was settling into fog when Virgil untied the mule and led it to the barn. He lit a lantern and hung it on a nail driven into a stall post. He placed the animal in its stall and pitched down hay for it to eat. After returning the shovel, pick, and axe to their places he got the curry brush and returned to comb the animal. The heat from the mule filled the small space and drove the chill from Virgil's body. The rich scent of hay and manure filled his nostrils as he drew the brush down the animal's flank, watching the muscles ripple under the stiff bristles. As he worked he thought of Faye waving to him, how her hand seemed to glide through the air. He thought about the faint smile on her lips and the blush that the chill of the air brought to her cheeks. He brushed the mule for much longer than usual. Its coat was completely free of the mud from the day's work when Virgil finally placed the brush back in its place, retrieved the lantern, and left the barn.

Virgil entered the house and shed his mud-soaked clothes, placing them next to the door. He set the lantern on the table and quickly put on clean garments. He stoked the coals in the

hearth, adding wood until a fire blazed. He extinguished the lantern and went back to the hearth. Standing before the fire, he noticed with amazement that the only book his father owned, the leather bound Bible, still occupied its place on the mantel. His father had obviously forgotten it that morning in his haste, as he normally took it with him whenever he traveled. Virgil lifted the Bible from its place and inspected its cover. The letters on the front were worn from years of fingers rubbing them and were barely legible. Virgil had never read the Word himself, as his father had not yet considered him old enough to see God's perfect plan for himself. His curiosity overcame him and Virgil squatted before the fire, opened the book, and began to read. He read not as a believer or disbeliever, but only to see for himself the words that his father had used in teaching him about his purpose and fate. He read of the fall of man and his expulsion from paradise and of the flood which was to wash away all sin. He also read of the crucifixion and resurrection. As he searched through the worn pages he discovered one which had been torn out , folded, and placed near the back. He opened it carefully and studied it. A large tree was printed on the page and names and dates were written in lines which protruded from the branches. He quickly came to see that these names and dates were the record of his family. His parents' birth dates were listed, and their marriage date was recorded where their separate branches met. Virgil searched until he found his own birth date, which was listed as January 13, 1917. He traced his mother's branch until he discovered the date of her death: February 23,1917. Below the date, written in the cramped hand of his father, was a statement concerning her death. It read "She was a strong woman and good wife, already up working to see the livestock through this worst winter in some time. God must have his reason for putting the sickness in her lungs. It must be her time." Virgil refolded the paper and returned it to its place in the book. He placed the Bible back on the mantel and sat again before the fire. Light and darkness danced on the walls of the spare room as he regarded its contents: his father's bed to his left, his own to the right, the iron skillet hanging next to the hearth, the rough table and cupboard in the far corner. As the fire died down, Virgil felt himself fill the space in the room until the walls seemed to press against his shoulders and head. Coals were all that remained of the fire when he finally stood from his place. After taking a blanket from his bed he left the house and walked to the barn. The mule stirred in its stall as Virgil settled into the empty one.

The cold, damp smell of hay and manure filled Virgil's nostrils as he opened his eyes. He stood slowly in the darkness, his body stiff from the hard packed dirt and straw. Opening the barn door, he looked out on the yard and field which were bathed in dim, predawn light. He returned to the house and stared at the dead hearth. He went to his bed and reached under it, removing the only gift his father had ever given him. He loaded the .22 rifle and put on his jacket, checking the pockets for extra bullets. He went to the cupboard and took matches and a knife used to clean meat. He left the house and walked to the woods which lay adjacent to it. He crouched in the damp leaves and blew into his hands to warm them. The branches shook their dew onto Virgil's head. He stood slowly and brought his rifle to his shoulder. He sighted into the maze of limbs until locating his target. The sound of the recoil ricocheted through the trees, shattering their silence. The squirrel fell to the ground. Virgil took it to a clearing away from the house and cleaned it. With wood from the pile next to the house he built a fire. He erected a spit from small branches and cooked the animal, watching the fat melt from the flesh, sizzling as it hit the flames. He ate with zest and discarded what he did not want.

HE STOOD SLOWLY AND BROUGHT HIS RIFLE TO HIS SHOULDER. HE SIGHTED INTO THE MAZE OF LIMBS UNTIL LOCATING HIS TARGET. THE SOUND OF THE RECOIL RICOCHETED THROUGH THE TREES, SHATTERING THEIR SILENCE...

After the meal, he fed the mule and returned to the field. Again the sky hung heavy with the threat of rain. Virgil went to a new stump and hitched the mule to it. Commanding the beast to pull, he slapped the reins harshly onto the mule's flank. The animal jerked on the harness, braying, frightened by the stinging reins. Virgil swung the axe vigorously, his muscles straining as he drove the blade into the resistant wood. His arms were heavy with fatigue when the stump was finally pulled free. He did not stop to eat, but led the mule to another stump, once again driving it without mercy to pull. When the sky began to dim, five stumps had been cleared. Virgil led the animal to the barn and secured it, but did not return to the house afterward. Instead, he rekindled the fire in the clearing to warm himself, and when exhaustion pulled on his back, returned to the barn to sleep.

Virgil continued this until his father returned. On the last day he was alone, the final stump was jerked from the earth, leaving a muddy wound. He woke the next morning and reentered the house. He cleaned it and washed the discarded muddy clothes that he had left by the door on the first night. A fire was stoked and the house returned to normal when he heard the wagon creaking into the yard. He went outside. "What you doing here this time of day, Boy? I told you to clear that field," his father said harshly from the wagon.

"The field's done cleared," Virgil answered.

"I ain't got time for lies, Boy, now get to those stumps. I'll be out directly to see that you do your chores."

Virgil stared at his father, then sullenly went to the barn and got the mule and tools. He drove the animal to the rise that overlooked the cleared field. The scars of his effort had not yet healed. Each hole was ragged and filled with the mire of winter rain. The stumps lay in a huge pile, their twisted, chopped roots protruding from their bases like broken arms and legs. Virgil drove the shovel into the ground and wrapped the mule's reins around it. He squatted in the mud of the new-cut path and waited.

"I told you to work, Boy," his father shouted as he came up the rise. "If you won't work on your own, I can...," his voice trailed off as he came to stand beside Virgil. The man quietly surveyed the destruction, his expression remaining unchanged. Finally he spoke. "There's harnesses and tools to fix for the plantin'. Get back to the barn and start sharpening the plow blade." Virgil rose without speaking and gathered the tools. He led the mule back to the barn and started the long sharpening process, drawing the whetstone endlessly back and forth across the long edge of the plow. He remained there until dusk, then returned to the house.

After the evening meal Virgil took his place before the fire and his father took the Bible into his large hands and sat in his chair. His voice droned behind Virgil's back, speaking once again of the wages of sin and the cost of redemption. The words fell dully on Virgil's deaf ears. His mind was filled not with the Word of God but with the image of the faded tree on the secret page and the faint smile on Faye's lips. The sermon concluded at the usual time and Virgil went to bed. As his mind floated into sleep the image of the burning city on the bluff blazed with new intensity.

In the weeks that followed Virgil worked tirelessly to prepare the farm for the spring plant. When the time came he drove the mule to the fields and hitched it to the plow. The blade shone like white fire, reflecting the early morning sun's rays as Virgil set the point in the soft earth and slapped the reins on the mule's back, calling harshly for the beast to pull. He pushed instead of guided the plow, driving the steel blade into the earth, laying it open like a fresh wound. Back and forth across the field he drove the mule. Its coat was slick with sweat and its legs heavy with fatigue, stumbling forward as the last row was cut. Virgil pulled it to a halt and surveyed the field. He squatted in the black soil and picked up a clod. He squeezed the moist earth in his fist, watching the dirt squeeze between his fingers until all that was left was a black paste on his palm. He stood and stared at the setting sun, then drove the mule home. By week's end both the old and new fields were plowed and planted. Virgil had done the work himself, his father having spent the time breaking the pulled stumps into kindling.

The torrents of spring came and filled the earth. Small rivers formed between the rows. The fragile, twisted bodies of the cotton plants pushed slowly out of the soil, struggling to gain hold against the elements. Virgil worked tirelessly from dawn to dusk, swinging the hoe into the soil between the plants, ripping the weeds from the ground before they had time to set their roots against the cotton. The battle against the weeds continued endlessly through April and May, stretching into June.

Virgil's father took Virgil with him on a warm late spring day to the Milner farm to ask about renting yet more land, as Virgil had proven himself capable of the work. The trees along the road were thick with leaves which shifted slowly in the warm breeze as they traveled to the nearby farm. They found Milner in the barn, shoeing a horse. Faye sat on a barrel watching her father work. Virgil noticed how her summer bonnet lay on the nape of her neck, held in place by strings which tied in front, resting against her throat. As his father talked to Milner he watched her snap beans and toss them into a bucket which lay at her feet. Her wrists pulled at the beans, then broke gently as the pods acquiesced. After she finished she stood, then bent and clutched the bucket's handle. As she passed out of the barn her eyes met Virgil's for an instant. His face grew flush and a dull sound roared in his ears.

"I said get to the wagon, Virgil," his father's commanded, breaking Virgil's trance. He moved to the wagon and climbed onto the seat. His father followed. After they had moved some distance from the farm his father spoke. "I saw you look at that girl, Boy."

Virgil did not respond. He stared straight ahead.

"You have no business with womanflesh, Boy. You're corrupted enough. You put that girl out of your mind and start thinking about this new field. You hear me, Boy?," his father said as he glared at Virgil from under the brim of his black hat. "I said, you hear me, Boy?"

Virgil felt his jaw grow hard. "Yes,Sir," he finally said.

As the summer mounted Virgil worked the fields with vigor. Sweat poured from his brow as he swung the hoe or axe. The effort helped relieve the ache he always had in his muscles, an ache made stronger by the memory of Faye. The work also helped vent the anger that swelled inside him whenever he thought about the page torn from the Bible. He saw his father's face in the exposed wood of a tree as he brought the axe down onto it, sending splinters flying. He worked as he had not worked before, feeling himself drive the land to produce rather than being a slave to it as he had been before. As time wore on he began to leave the fields in the late afternoon and explore the woods which surrounded them. He was productive enough that his father would not notice his absence by the lack of work accomplished. He carried his rifle with him in the mornings, and when the sun was well into its slow decline he took it with him as he climbed down into a deep ravine which ran parallel to the farm some distance back in the forest.

The underbrush was thick along the ravine bottom and it clawed at Virgil's face and clothes as he struggled through it. Breaking through it he discovered a stream. Small fish swam in the clear water as he squatted on its bank. Light bounced off the ripples like bullets as he rested on the cool, damp

ground. After a while he stood and stepped into the water, feeling its coolness seep through his boots, easing the ache in his tired feet. He walked in the water upstream, finally pushing through the brush on the other side. He scrambled up the steep ravine walls and emerged at the edge of a huge hayfield. Rabbits jumped without fear through the tall grass. Virgil loaded his rifle and shot one. He retrieved it and tied it to his belt. It was only then that he noticed how low the sun had sunk in the sky. His heart leaped into his throat as he ran back down toward the stream.

Dusk had fallen over the farm when Virgil returned home. The windows were glowing from the fire in the hearth. Virgil cautiously climbed the steps of the porch. He caught his breath and reached for the door. Before his hand touched the handle the door was flung open from the inside. His father's frame blocked out the light from the fire.

"Where you been, Boy," the man shouted as he grabbed Virgil's arm and shook him. "Answer me, Boy."

Virgil turned his head in fear.

"You been with that girl, hadn't you? I told you to stay away from womanflesh." His hot breath blasted Virgil's face as he looked into the dark, furious eyes.

"I wasn't with her. I found this stream," he said weakly.

"Don't lie to me, Boy," his father shouted as he brought his hand down on Virgil's shoulder, knocking him off the porch and unto his back. His rifle flew from his hand as he landed on the rabbit, feeling its bones break under his weight. He looked up at his father towering over him.

"You're a liar and fornicator, Boy, and that'll surely land you in Hell," he said as he stepped down to the ground. "God ain't fooled by that rabbit and I ain't, either," he shouted as he pulled Virgil to his feet. "Maybe this'll bring some sense to you 'fore God sends you to your doom," he said as he brought his fist across Virgil's mouth.

Virgil tasted the blood as another blow came across his nose, spraying more blood onto his face. He reeled back and his father advanced, bringing a heavy palm across the side of Virgil's head. Virgil fell to his knees and felt his guts wrench, trying to expel the pain. He sat up after the spasms subsided and drew an arm tenderly across his bruised face. His father still stood in the yard, looking down on him.

"Let this be a lesson to you not mock God's plan, Boy," he finally said. "Now clean yourself up and get to bed. There'll be plenty of work for you tomorrow."

Virgil watched through lids like slits as his father entered the house. He then stood and walked slowly to the well around the side of the house and drew up a bucket of water. As he dumped the liquid onto his head and watched the red-stained fluid splatter on the ground, he felt his heart grow hard and cold.

The next day Virgil's father drove him like Virgil drove the mule, watching him toil under the blinding white July sky. His labor continued through August and into September. The cotton hung heavy from the plants as harvest time approached. Virgil had not left his father's sight for more than an hour since the beating, and his father finally determined that he had learned his lesson. He decided to leave him alone again when he drove to Helena to sell the crop to the gin. He instructed Virgil to begin the harvest while he was gone. He would bring back men and more wagons to finish the job, then travel with them back to the gin to collect the money.

VIRGIL FELL TO HIS KNEES AND FELT HIS GUTS WRENCH, TRYING TO EXPEL THE PAIN. HE SAT UP AND DREW AN ARM TENDERLY ACROSS HIS BRUISED FACE. HIS FATHER STILL STOOD IN THE YARD, LOOKING DOWN ON HIM...

"You remember the punishment for your lies and deceit, Boy," his father said to him before departing on a warm morning in late September. "You'll not fail while I'm gone if you fear God's wrath. He won't show the mercy that I have."

Virgil stared at the ground with his hands clasped in front of him while his father spoke. He did not move or look up when the wagon lurched into motion. It was only after the sound of the wheels crawling along the dry, cracked road faded that Virgil moved. He went into the barn and gathered the cotton sacks. He then headed to the fields and began to rip the harvest from the earth. The spindles on the plants dug into his skin, trying to prevent the rape as he ripped the heavy flowers from their hold. His hands were swollen and crisscrossed with cuts when the day was finished, but Virgil felt no pain. He returned to the house and piled the cotton into the barn. He then entered the house and retrieved his rifle from its place under his bed and went back outside. He hunted his meal, and as he had done in the winter, did not reenter the house until his father returned. He cooked his game over an open fire and slept under the wide autumn sky.

Virgil topped the rise which overlooked the house as the sun set four days later. He drug behind him the last sack of the harvest. His father's wagon stood in the yard, along with two others. His father stepped onto the porch as Virgil entered the yard and released his burden from his back.

"How much is left to pick, Boy?," the man asked.

"None," Virgil replied.

"Don't try me, Boy. I can see the truth for myself." Virgil sat on the ground and leaned forward, stretching his tired back. "Look in the fields," he said.

He sat while his father left to survey the harvest. The sun was down and the quarter moon was climbing over the horizon through the trees when the man returned.

"I'll leave with the men in the morning," his father said as he climbed to the porch. "You clear and plow the fields while I'm gone. We'll lay in winter wheat this year."

Virgil watched his father enter the house. He soon followed and prepared a meal for the men from the gin. He did not sleep in the house that night, as his bed was occupied. Instead, he slept under the last stars of September.

He rose early the next morning and cooked breakfast. His father gave him instructions and then they departed, the cotton harvest driving the wagons low between the wheels, straining the steel supports. After the men left, Virgil cleaned up the remains of the meal. After he was finished he did not go to the fields. Instead, he got his rifle and put on his jacket. He moved into the woods and walked until he came to the ravine. He descended its bank until he came to the stream. He followed it until he found a space in the bank that was not choked with brush. There he made his camp.

He lived by the stream for the next three days, exploring the country during the day and sitting by the fire at night, listening to the water trickle past him and to the sounds of the night creatures. He stared up at the stars which were too numerous to count. The days were still warm but the nights were chill. Virgil's jacket and the fire kept him warm. The heat of the summer had burned the leaves from the trees, producing an early, blighted abscission.

On the last day before his father returned Virgil traveled farther than he ever had before. He ranged through woods and fields, chasing rabbits and watching men complete their harvest from the shadows of the forest. The sun was well past its zenith when he began to make his way back to the ravine. He came to the pasture that he had discovered in July. He stood at the edge of the woods and looked out across it. The tall grass hung heavily in the still October air. The late afternoon sun cut slices of shadow through the field as he waited, his rifle in his hand. A clump of grass flinched. Virgil eased to the ground and brought the rifle to his shoulder. The pasture jerked in a wave as he traced the line in his sights. The ripples reached the edge of the grass and emerged. The rabbit sat on its haunches, sniffing the dead air. Assured that there was no danger, it began nibbling on the tender shoots. Virgil held his breath and squared the animal in his sights; he pulled the trigger. The rabbit leapt into the air, its body contracting, recoiling from the fire buried within it. Virgil stood and walked toward it. Standing over it, he watched its chest heave violently as its blood seeped into the dry earth like oil. He watched the wild panic in its black eyes fade into a dull death-stare. He set the rifle down and picked the animal up by the ear, feeling the weight of its body pull against its neck. He swung it laxly as he scanned the distant woodline, then tied the animal to his belt.

He bent and recovered the rifle. Swinging it onto his shoulder, he moved back into the woods. He picked up his faint trail and descended slowly into the ravine. He pushed carefully through the bottom underbrush and emerged at the edge of the stream. The sky was streaked with autumn orange and red as he stepped into the water and followed its course. He held close to the bank, wading through the shallow rock bed. He passed silently down the ravine as the sky slowly gave up the fight, its brilliant colors fading into blue.

The ravine was in deep shadow when Virgil left the stream and scrambled up the bank. He again picked up his trail. The ground was soft with discarded foliage, the evening air tinged with the pale scent of decay and rest as he passed quickly through the ancient forest. A yellow moon was climbing through the bare branches of the distant trees as he emerged from the dark woods. The bare limbs of the cotton plants stretched before him. The tattered shreds of the deflowering hung from the stalks, marking the violence he had wreaked on them.

Virgil turned and followed the wagon path. The moon slowly broke free as he walked, bathing him in clear, soft light. He thrust his hands into his jacket pockets as he topped the last rise. He squatted in the dirt and set his rifle down. Faint wisps of vapor escaped his mouth as he regarded the scene below, pulling his jacket close against the October chill. The outline of the house was barely visible against the deep forest which stood behind it. A dim yellow light seeped from

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the murky window, indicating that his father had returned early. Virgil stood and took the rabbit from his belt. His father would see a fire, and he didn't want that. He swung the rabbit hard and released it as it stretched out in front of him. He listened to the body crash into the forest. He sat back down and watched the stars swing through the heavens. He felt their distance and the immensity of the sky and felt also that this plot of land which had once been his whole world was nothing more than an insignificant speck of dust floating on a wind which was not aware that it existed.

The moon had been swallowed by the horizon when Virgil stood and left the path. He moved to the woods which ran next to the house until he came to an ancient oak. He settled into a blanket of leaves beneath it and pulled his jacket closer. He lay looking at the stars through the empty limbs of tree. As his head grew heavy the stars grew in brilliance, until they shone like the city on the bluff.

The soft breeze which marked the sun's return woke Virgil from a deep sleep. He shook his head to free himself from its seductive caress and stood. The woods were bathed in dim, predawn light. Retrieving his rifle, he moved through the forest until he could see the house through the trees. The light was again visible through the window and smoke curled slowly from the chimney. Virgil squatted in the leaves and watches as the door opened and his father stepped onto the porch. He was dressed in the same broadcloth pants and coat which he had worn for all of Virgil's life. His black hat with its wide, flat brim sat atop his head, and beneath it his hard, distant eyes surveyed the land above a jaw set in grim determination. He stepped off the porch and shouted Virgil's name, commanding him to appear. Getting no response, he moved around the house and out of Virgil's sight.

"THERE'S NO DEVIL IN ME," HE SHOUTED. "THE DEVIL IS JUST A WORD YOU USE TO BEAT ME DOWN." VIRGIL'S HEAD SNAPPED BACK AS HIS FATHER'S HAND CAME DOWN.

Virgil moved out of the woods and onto the porch. He sat on the step, holding the rifle between his spread knees. The morning was broken by the sound of the barn door crashing open. Virgil sat silent, listening to the mules bray and the sound of leather and chains being roughly placed across their shoulders. Looking up, he watched the rise where he had sat the night before slowly fill with color as the sun broke over the horizon. His heart quickened as he heard the barn door swing shut and the steady plod of the mules approach. He did not look up when his father drove them into the yard.

"Where you been, Virgil?," the man asked as he pulled the mules to a halt. Virgil did not answer. "I asked you a question, Boy," he said as he moved to stand over Virgil. The tops of his father's boots and the rough, plain cloth of his pants filled Virgil's vision. "I figured you'd learned your lesson, Boy, but I reckon I was wrong. Get your tools and get to the fields. I'll work you 'til you drop."

Virgil looked into his father's hard face and did not get up. The face darkened with rage.

"I said get to the fields, Boy. The land won't work itself!" he shouted.

Virgil watched the storm rage across his father's brow. "I ain't going to the fields, no more," he said deliberately. He felt his father's rough hand clamp onto his shoulder and pull him to his feet. His father's hot breath swept across his face as the two men stood toe to toe.

"What kind of devilment is in you now, Boy. Is it that whore?" Virgil's fists clenched, the right one squeezing the rifle.

"There's no devil in me," he shouted. "The devil is just a word you use to beat me down." Virgil's head snapped back as his father's hand came down.

Virgil staggered back, catching himself on a roof post. His eyes watered from the blow. He pulled his arm across them, clearing his vision. His father stood with his shoulders hunched, his head thrust forward.

"You will not mock God's Word. You know the signs he sent, you've seen what your sins have brought down on you. Liar, whoremonger," the man shouted.

"I ain't no liar and I ain't touched that girl," Virgil shouted back. "I ain't no filthy sinner, I seen the Book. Mama didn't die because of me. God didn't send a sign, God didn't..."

Virgil's voice left him as his father knocked him back onto the porch. He brought his foot up in defense as his father lunged at him. It was knocked away by the powerful sweep of his father's arm. The world went black as his father's fist came down on his face. He jerked the rifle to meet the midsection and fired. His father's weight came crashing down on him. His shallow, rapid breathing filled Virgil's ear. He pushed his father off of himself and leapt up. He watched his father struggle to speak. The jaw worked soundlessly, the eyes were filled with panic and confusion. He stood over his father until the face relaxed and the eyes grew dull.

Virgil looked down at the rifle he still clutched. He threw it to the ground and looked down at his chest. It was covered with his father's blood. He ripped his jacket and shirt off and ran to the well. He drew enough water to fill the tub which stood next to it. He removed the the rest of his clothes and jumped into the cold water where he scrubbed the blood stains from his torso and arms. The sun was well into the sky when he emerged from the tub. He walked back to the house and entered it, stepping over his father's body. He put on fresh clothes and reached under his bed and produced a sack. He

filled it with cured ham, extra clothes, and other provisions. Before he left the house he went to the hearth and lifted the Bible from its place on the mantel. He rubbed the worn cover with the palm of his hand and placed it in the bag. He went outside and retrieved his rifle and placed it and the bag on the porch. He found his blood stained jacket and picked it up. He brushed the dust off and put it on. The mules had bolted when the rifle went off, so he set out to find them.

The animals were standing in the middle of the nearest field. Virgil walked through the dead cotton plants and grabbed the reins of one. He led the beast back to the yard and hitched it to a roof post. He went to the barn and got the shovel and returned to the porch. He tied the harness to his father's dead leg and slapped the reins viciously on the mule's back. The animal jumped, jerking his father's body off the porch, the head bouncing violently on the steps as the body fell to the ground. Virgil pulled the mule to a stop and retrieved his rifle, bag, and the shovel from the porch, then secured them on the animal's back. He then slapped the reins again and drove the animal toward the fields.

Virgil looked back at his father's body dragging along the path. The neck had been broken on a rock and the head twisted unnaturally as Virgil drove the mule on. He pulled the animal to a stop when they reached the top of the rise which overlooked the field that Virgil had cleared in the spring. He took the shovel and began to dig, throwing huge clods of dirt over his shoulder as he worked. When he determined that the hole was deep enough, he stopped. He guided the mule until the body fell into the hole. The body lay on its side with the head twisted around, the face staring into the afternoon sun. Virgil drove the point of the shovel into the ground. He stared at his father's face and withdrew the blade. "Here's your Hell, Daddy," he said before turning and hurling the shovel deep into the field, watching the sun reflect off the blade as it spun end over end. He watched it skidded across the ground, then went to the mule and released the harness, leaving the bit and reins. He rechecked the ties that secured his rifle and bag, then mounted the beast. He turned the mule around and slapped the reins against its neck, driving it toward Memphis.

Kudzu needs artwork!

We're looking for two different kinds of art: interior artwork and a cover piece for each issue. Ideally, we would like b&w illustrations for the interior and either b&w or color for the cover. If you'd be interested in working with us or contributingyour artwork to *Kudzu* (or know someone who might), contact us at <<kudzu@etext.org>> for more info.

A Marriage

Richard Cumyn

"After all," she said with a glance to her husband, "it is to be a marriage, is it not?"

On December 28, 1957, Lewis Goodfellow decided to borrow a baby for a couple of hours. Because he sat on the board of directors of the Civic Hospital, he was familiar enough and distinguished enough looking to walk through the halls of the obstetrics ward without drawing undue attention. Without the least hesitation, he walked into the room where they incubated the newborn babies and walked out with the one who was crying the loudest. The people who cleaned the hospital gowns at the Civic were called Emmett Cleaners and it was with the scent of ammonia and borax in his nostrils that Lewis christened his son.

He looked around. The place was packed with babies. The nurses were run off their feet. He was sure no one would miss this one for an hour or two, least of all the young mother who had just that day signed the papers which put this baby up for adoption. An authoritative snoop, he had matched the name on the bassinet with the one he had read on a list on the head nurse's desk. Putim, an odd one to be sure.

Round a corner he was stopped by one nurse who arched her eyebrows at him.

"Sir?"

"First grandson. Heir to the throne and all that."

The nurse pretended to melt, but she knew full well whose baby he was. It was that girl's, the one who had given up her child and would tip—toe out too soon after delivery. Apollonia Putim— for that was her name— would walk away without her son. Lewis Goodfellow was walking out, having chosen her son as his own. To the nurse there must have seemed a smooth and mysteriously efficient rightness to the transfer. On paper she knew she could make mother and child disappear with the obliteration of a file, which she did. To do so gave her an odd satisfaction but no ease to her fatigue, for it seemed those days, ever since that Sputnik had gone up, as if a baby was being born every ten minutes. The only other person to witness the abduction was the mother herself, and she never forgot a face.

It all began as a practical joke. He set up a nursery in the spare room complete with Disney cartoon wallpaper, rocker, change table, crib, and two—day old boy child. Lewis brought the baby home and congratulated his wife on her fine delivery and even finer recovery. Nadia was just drunk enough to wonder about the truth of the statement. Had she? She could not remember. God but her head hurt. It could not be. She was too old for this sort of biology. She panicked for a moment, then recovered.

The bastard, she thought. That was it, she was not going to put up with him an instant longer. It was obvious to her that this meant he did not love her and wanted her gone.

"Fine," she said, "I'll go." And she left, disgusted, never knowing the little boy who began on loan but never went back.

"He's Emmett. Say hello, Pet."

"Lovely, Lewis, a little gem. Now clear out of the way."

"Emmett Goodfellow. Has a ring, don't you think? It was stenciled on the laundry."

"Then why don't you bag the little cretin and put him through a wash? He smells. Hand me that grip there."

"You're not leaving, are you, dearest?"

"I'll not remain in this asylum a moment longer. You and your progeny can play about your twisted little games unencumbered by me. Obviously I have no sense of humour."

"But Nadia," he pretended to protest.

"You… you," she sputtered into her scotch, "are incomprehensile."

"But where will you go?"

"Toronto. I'll stay at my sister's. You'll be good enough to drive me to the train. I'll send for my things later."

"May I suggest the bus, dear. It is much quicker."

"Whatever."

He could have saved it there, held himself back, told her his true intentions. But no. He had to squeeze one last chuckle out of a grim situation as she retreated, spirited away in the dead waste and middle of the night on a bus bound for Maniwaki, Quebec.

He returned to the Civic that evening with his excuse rehearsed. He would say that he had been so taken with the baby that he had walked out and lost track of the time. But no one confronted him, no police constable stepped forward with a warrant for his arrest for kidnapping. Emmett slept peacefully in his arms. At the nursery observation window he saw that Emmett's bassinet was occupied. Further down the hall he saw that the young Putim girl had vanished, her bed now filled by another. It struck him suddenly that he was going home to an empty house. He liked the feeling of the warm, clean smelling bundle in his arms. That night Emmett came home to stay.

A week later, a young woman rang at the front door.

"Yes?" said Lewis. "May I help you, Miss."

"I am Apollonia Putim," she said as she used her suitcase to wedge past him into the vestibule. "I have come for my son."

"You can't just barge in here like this. This is preposterous! Now see here."

"A mother has a right to see her own child."

"You signed adoption papers. Your rights in this matter have been waived, I'm afraid."

"Oh, save the cock for the bull, Mr. Goodfellow. Now

continued

where is he? Where is my Jari?"

"His name is Emmett. At the moment he is upstairs with his nurse and will not be disturbed."

"You can tell nursie to hit the road."

"Miss, if you do not vacate the premises immediately—"

"You know, Mr. Goodfellow, you weren't as tough to track down as I thought you'd be. You got a very lanternous jaw." She held a page of newspaper featuring his photograph above an artist's sketch of one of his buildings. "You really going to build that ugly glass thing?"

"I design the structures, Miss… "

"Apollonia. After Apollo."

"Miss Apollonia, you cannot stay here. You have given up your legal claim to guardianship."

"You stole him! I could call up the authorities right now and tell them you deducted my baby."

"Abducted. I have not abducted him. I have merely borrowed the child."

"That's a good one. Borrowed. Ha! Like a cup of sugar. I think I'll collect my Jari now." She began to climb the stairs.

"Wait, don't wake him yet," he stalled. "He was up howling at the moon all night. Will you… have a cup of tea? Only until he wakes."

"I don't know. I've got people waiting. The baby's father — I mean my husband, my husband is waiting. And my parents."

"Just a few minutes."

"Yes, all right. Just tea."

She followed him into the kitchen where he motioned for her to sit at the table.

"You have a place to go? A place for the baby to sleep?"

"Of course," she said. "Oh, yes, well I may look a mess right now, but that's only because I have spent so much time tracking you down, you see. Yes, we have a fine crib for the baby. A painted rocker crib. From Prague. My father had it sent over. You can't find anything like it here."

"I see. What d'you take?"

"What? Nothing. I didn't take nothing. Anything."

"In your tea."

"Oh! Sugar. Just sugar. Two glumps."

"Two glumps it is." He sat with his tea. "I'm going to miss the little admiral."

"Yes, of course. You should have thought about that before you hoisted him."

"I had no idea that one could become so attached to such a thing as a baby. Really, my plan was to bring him right back."

"Plans," she said in a loud voice. "Ha! My plan was to walk away forever. So much for plans. I tell you, that is what would have happened, Mr. Goodfellow, famous skyscraper builder. Except I am looking out my hospital room, planning how I am going to kill myself, thinking at least my baby will be in a nice home, and I see this very extinguished looking man bustling down the hall with my kid. I know he is mine because I go over to the window where they usually park them and there he is: gone. So, what do you know? I get curious and I think, I can remember a gent like that."

"And here you are."

"Yes, you're right about that. Here I am."

They were interrupted by the nurse, who brought Emmett into the kitchen for his noon feeding. Apollonia pushed her chair over backwards getting up and reaching for the bundle.

"I'll take over from here, Nursie." The visiting V.O.N. looked to Lewis for direction.

"It's all right," he said.

"He's starving! Haven't you people been feeding the kid? Get a bottle on, for God sake. Where do you keep the formula?"

The nurse guided her through the steps of mixing the formula, warming the bottle, testing it, and finally settling with the suckling on her lap.

"Can you believe I've never done this before?"

The nurse rolled her eyes at Lewis. "Thank you, Nurse," he said. "We won't be requiring your services any further."

"I could come a few days longer."

"No, that won't be necessary."

"You're getting another nurse, then?"

"I will be engaging the services of… Miss Apollonia, here."

The nurse made a nominal effort to check but not hide her scepticism.

"You have my telephone number," she said at the door.

"Indeed I do. You will be the first I will call should emergency arise."

In the background they heard, "Oh, for the love of Mike! You little bastard. So that's why they call you the little admiral."

Apologetically, Lewis bid the nurse goodbye.

"I assume you will be leaving now," he said to a now agitated Apollonia.

"Here, hold him for a second, will you? The little fireplug got me a good one. How are you with a bottle?"

He held the wet bundle away from his body. "He is beginning to cry again."

"That's good. You have very keen ears. Thank you for bringing that important fact to my attention."

"Your sarcasm is wholly inappropriate, young lady. I be-

"You stole him! I could call up the authorities right now and tell them you deducted my baby."

"Abducted. I have not abducted him. I have merely borrowed the child."

lieve his diaper requires changing."

"Don't call me that. Change it yourself. I have to rinse out my skirt."

"If I knew how to change diapers, I would not have needed the services of a nurse, now would I? You're the one who came charging in here to take over. Why don't you just— yes, yes, love, it's all right, there, there— just pack up the little screamer and leave?"

She finished blotting her skirt with a dishtowel and took the child from him.

"Where do you keep the diapers?"

"How should I know? The nurse did all that. Look in the drawer under the oven."

"I'll look upstairs."

"Can't this keep until you get home?" he asked.

"You know, Mr. Lewis Goodfellow," she called back from the middle of the stairs, "if you weren't prepared to take care of the baby, you shouldn't have taken him out of the hospital."

"Is that so? Well, young lady, if you weren't prepared to care for a baby, then—"

She was back down the stairs and on him before he could finish.

"Don't say it. Don't you say it, you pompous know—it—all. You don't know nothing about it, so just shut your big mouth."

"You're disturbing the baby."

"He'll live. What did you think it was going to be like, mister, raising a son all by yourself? Did you think all you would have to do is hire somebody? What happens when he starts asking questions?"

"I don't have to worry about that now, do I? To tell you the truth, I'm just as glad to see him go. He served his purpose."

"Is that so? Well, la—dee—dah. Steal a baby, hire a nurse, snap your powerful fingers and this is that. Must be nice."

"Change its diaper, please."

"Wouldn't you just like that? Wouldn't you love it if I went upstairs with this howling monkey and made him all sweet and dry and calm again? Well, not on your life, brother. Here. See you around, sweetheart."

"You're not leaving."

"Just watch me."

"All right," he said, "good riddance. And don't come back or I'll have the law after you."

"The law? You will have the law after me? What if I just march on down to the police station and file a certain kidnapping report?"

"We have been over this before. Take him, then. Here, he's all yours. Warts and all."

"You don't really mean that."

"Woman, the child is yours! Take possession. Return to your waiting husband, your embracing family. Repent of your momentary lapse in maternal devotion. No, think nothing of it. Forget about it entirely. It never happened. This never happened."

"It's a matter of principle now," she said.

"Good God, what do you want? Do you want me down on my knees kissing your feet? Will you have me sweat blood? What?"

"IT'S A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE NOW," SHE SAID. "GOOD GOD, WHAT DO YOU WANT? DO YOU WANT ME DOWN ON MY KNEES KISSING YOUR FEET? WILL YOU HAVE ME SWEAT BLOOD? WHAT?"

She took Emmett from him in the momentary calm that followed. She wrapped him in a dry towel and stuck the half—full bottle back into his mouth.

"Won't you miss him?"

"Of course I will miss the little admiral. He is and will always be commander of the fleet. I will recover."

"Yes, but will he?"

"With me, as has been demonstrated, his safety is not fully guaranteed."

"I can tell that Jari likes it here. He wrinkles his nose when he smiles."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Don't you have a wife or anything?"

"No, I don't. Or anything. What does that have to do with it?"

"Well, just about everything. How are you supposed to manage without a wife?"

"I am managing quite splendidly so far. Will you please explain yourself? What about expectant husband? Doting grandparents?"

"Yes, well. You're right, of course. I've taken far too much of your time. I am really sorry for intruding."

"Not at all. Don't give it another thought."

"Thank you for taking care of my child."

"It has been my pleasure completely. He is going to be a winner this one, I can tell. A real trouper. He has his mother's spirit." She made for the door. "Wait. Aren't you forgetting the boy of the hour?" he asked.

"Oh, no, I couldn't take him from you now."

"What? You've just finished saying… "

"You will be able to give him a much better home than I would. You are just the person I had in mind when I let him go."

"But wait. I've changed my mind. You're right. How am I supposed to manage without help? It would be impossible."

"Call up nursie again."

"I don't think you have anywhere to go. You don't, do you?"

"What a silly notion. Goodbye to you, Mr. Architect."

"You don't have a home. That's why you're here."

"There are many places I can go. So many. I came to see that my first born and only son was safe. I have done that. I am at peace with the universe."

"There is no husband, is there?"

"Don't be so smudge. You may be an older man, but it is obvious that you know nothing about how to talk to a woman. My mother always told me that a man who treats a woman like his queen will have her for life."

"Smug. The word is smug."

"I like smudge. Listen and maybe you'll learn something. No, there is no husband. No, there are no grandparents. Someday I will tell you about them. I want my own room and bath. I do not cook breakfasts, nor do I wash floors. We will negotiate salary when I am rested and less emotionally disturbed."

"I'm not so sure about this."

"Take or leave it. Find a better offer."

"What about night feedings?"

"Shared. I'm not crazy."

"All right," he told her. "I'll take you on one condition. You will be my housekeeper. You are not nor will you ever be the child's mother. If you advance any such notion, if you lay even the slightest hint of it at his feet, I will deny it and have you turned out of here so quickly that you'll never recover. Am I understood?"

"Fair enough," she said and they shook hands.

When Apollonia was a little girl, her father used to tell her a story called "The Burgomaster's Road." It was the only story he ever told. Usually his wife was the one to tell the children their bedtime stories. Although it was not Apollonia's favourite, it was the one she anticipated the most, because she kept hoping for a different ending.

The Burgomaster's Road

A master road tailor cut a long black ribbon and laid it across a patch of earth, but the earth revolted. Along came the townspeople in a herd, now awake to the disagreement between the land and the thoroughfare. A spokesman, the Burgomaster, tried to reason with the tailor.

"Come now, sirrah," he said, "you cannot let the shrugging of a hillock stray you from your purpose. We are cut off from any other town. You are here to link us to the world."

And the Burgomaster's wife admonished the man in kind, saying, "Would you leave us isolated? Would you keep us backward the rest of our lives? This is only a hill of rock barely covered by thorns. Even the sheep do not venture up here to graze. Be not deterred, we beg of you."

The road tailor replied, "It is not enough to lay my road anywhere. If there is discord between the bed and the occupant, then such a marriage is not to be," and he began to roll up his creation.

The townspeople raised their voices in protest. "Was there not a contract?" one demanded. "What about the tailor's obligation?" Again the Burgomaster was pushed forward to negotiate.

"What if the hillock were removed? Would that not save you fabric?"

The tailor explained. "I cut this road especially for this land, its rises and its valleys. I cannot make it fit another way." With that he packed the now tightly rolled road into a canvas bag and walked out of sight.

The townspeople stood silent and downhearted. They felt the hillock shift and settle as if it were releasing a sigh. Then a little boy asked, "Why can't the tailor build his road around the hill? Wouldn't it use the same amount of fabric?"

To this the throng began to murmur in agreement. "Yes!" they cried, "Bring him back. Tell him to lay his road around the hill."

But the Burgomaster's wife, who was proud and quick, reminded them of the tailor's words. He had made his road specifically to run over top of the hill and if the land and the road could not be in agreement ("After all," she said with a glance to her husband, "it is to be a marriage, is it not?") then there could be no road that way.

"He cannot be the only road tailor in the land," she said. "Let us find another who can build us our link to the rest of the world."

It so happened that in a wood by the river there lived a young man who had apprenticed with the master road tailor and who made his living now making private drives and garden pathways. Happy with his life, he was still learning his craft and understood that he would not become a full road tailor for many years. Even so, his driveways and paths were of the highest quality, always sitting without a wrinkle upon the earth. In this he took the greatest pride.

The Burgomaster's wife knew of the young man— he had laid a grand semicircular drive for her in front of their house— and she urged her husband to pay the apprentice a visit. Without delay he hurried to do so, his heavy chain of office banging against his belly. Yes, this would be the answer. And it would not cost as much to hire the apprentice. He thought about what he might commission with the savings, perhaps a statue of himself or a grand bridge in his name to span the river.

When he reached the apprentice's cottage, he knocked with his walking stick upon the door and was startled to hear the wood emit a sound like a cry of pain. He was ushered inside by the apprentice himself who looked upon the great man with awe. Shortly the proposal was put before him. A great commission. A grand ribbon of highway to stretch from their town to the next and from there to connect with all other roads.

"Think of it!" cried the Burgomaster. "You will help draw the whole world together. Oh, the sights, the wondrous sights!"

But the young man had been well taught. A road was no casual enterprise. Careful measurements had to be taken, not only of grade and slope but of soil density and drainage. The entire project would have to be conceived whole from a single bolt of cloth, cut to cleave perfectly to the earth it covered. There had to be harmony of all things corporeal and ethereal. These were the cautions he repeated to his visitor.

"But think of the honour this will bring to yourself and to

your family, my boy. It goes without saying that the increase to your business will be substantial. Of course, if you should feel that you are not yet ready for such an undertaking… ."

The chance to build a road this size was wildly exciting. The apprentice felt that he had been cutting pretty little drives and garden paths all his life. He wondered, though, why he and not his teacher had been approached to do this. He asked his commissioner.

"Him? He has become too old for a job of this magnitude. He said — now what were his exact words? — it called for a younger, steadier hand and eye to hold all the necessary elements in balance." Things corporeal and ethereal, thought the apprentice. "He recommended you above all others."

On hearing this, the young man let go of his last doubts. He shook the hand of the great man and promised that he would be out the next morning to survey the land.

When he arrived in town, he had all his equipment with him: his transit and rod, his book of tables, his soil—testing kit, his instruments for assaying the till, and a polished blue stone the size of his palm. A boy was chosen to hold the survey rod — oh, but he was the envy of his friends who hung close to him as he walked from one marker to the next when the apprentice called for him to move. They begged their friend for the chance to hold the graduated rod that was twice their height but he was immune to their bribes.

"THINK OF IT!" CRIED THE BURGOMASTER. "YOU WILL HELP DRAW THE WHOLE WORLD TOGETHER. OH, THE SIGHTS, THE WONDROUS SIGHTS!"

For three days the apprentice took measurements all along the proposed route. Each day fewer and fewer people came to watch until on the last day, many miles from the village square, there were only the apprentice and his rod porter.

"When will you cut and splice the road?" asked the boy as they sat eating their lunch in a field. He was beginning to tire of the sun and the flies. The man said that he would begin the next day. "I have decided to become a road maker like you," said the boy. "Will you teach me?"

The man was silent for a moment. "There is much to learn and much hard work," he said. "Even then…"

"Even then what?" the boy asked.

"Even then, there is no guarantee that what you try to build will sit."

The rod boy, who had never seen a highway before, was awed by his master's gravity. He wondered what could possibly go wrong. As if to answer, the young man pulled from his pocket the blue stone which the boy had not seen since the first day of work, work which by now had lost much of its allure.

The apprentice said, "Come and I will show you what I mean," and the boy followed him back the way they had come until they stopped at the rocky hillock which they climbed to the top. The man placed the stone, its liquid sheen rivaling the blue of the sky, on the ground. No sooner had he done this than the stone faded to grey, indistinguishable from those scattered among the thorns.

"What does it mean?" the boy demanded.

"Not good," was all the man said.

They resumed their measurements, reaching the next town just as dusk began to fall. The young man said nothing further about the strange stone. They took a room for the night but the apprentice slept fitfully. To the boy he seemed to be wrestling with an unseen opponent.

When he returned the following day, the young tailor told the Burgomaster that he could not build the road desired by the town. The great man exploded.

"First that spineless mystic and now you! This is insupportable. What possible reason can you give? No, don't tell me. I cannot bear it. Young man, you have but one obligation in this and that is to fulfill your contract. Otherwise you will bring the worst dishonour to your family. Furthermore, in case honour means nothing to you, I will ensure that you not work another day in your life in this town."

The young man said quietly that he understood and walked out of the Burgomaster's office. He felt as if there was nothing he could do. Unlike his teacher he could not simply pack up and practise elsewhere. He had not yet acquired the old man's skill or his experience. His family's pride when he was awarded the commission and their prayers for his success were twin reins tethering him to his obligation. Yet he knew the blue stone never lied.

He went home where, from his measurements, he worked all day and night cutting and stitching together the segments of the new road. At dawn the crowing cock startled him awake and he roused himself from his work bench where the shiny black folds of fabric spilled onto the floor. He hesitated. It was not too late. He could always use the material in his smaller jobs. His family would understand. It was a big world. Skills such as his were in demand everywhere. He could follow after his master, find him, and they could become partners. There was so much he still needed to learn about the profession. To back away from an impasse was hardly to admit defeat. Had his master not talked of this very thing, the primacy of the land? Listen to the earth, he had said. Let its whispers guide your hands. Sometimes it is better to put aside the shears than to turn those whispers to shrieks. Listen. It will reveal its natural borders to you.

He heard the cry of his door being pummeled and he rushed to open it. There was the Burgomaster backed by a parade of gaily dressed townspeople and a brass band playing marches.

"We have come to escort you," the great man boomed for the benefit of the crowd, "to the official unfurling of our new highway. Has there ever been such a day as this? We trust you had a productive night, my boy?"

He looked out and saw his parents and friends beaming at him from the crowd. For an instant he thought he saw his teacher's impassive face but the image vanished. He had done his work well, both the survey and the construction, no one could take that away from him. His design skirted the difficult hill by running the road through some lowlands and then back on course. This was his moment, none but his. He took it all in with a deep breath and pride welled inside him until he could hold it no longer. With a triumphant wave and a smile he dashed inside, gathered his handiwork loosely in his arms, and stepped out again with it trailing after him.

Everyone in the parade held a piece of the snaking highway in his hand. Leading the way, the Burgomaster held his section aloft on the end of his stick. Behind him the fabric swooped and dipped, here like a mother's skirt held tight by a tiny hand, there draped around the horn of a tuba. At the tail end the apprentice, overshadowed by his creation, was able to roll the greater part into a manageable cylinder as he walked, so that when parade reached the village square he resembled a bride's forgotten attendant still holding the train.

The music and chatter subsided and the expectant faces turned again to him. Moving from one person to the next, he gathered what remained of the fabric onto his roll. When he walked to the starting point at the edge of the square, the people fell in like sheep behind him. He secured the end of the fabric and began, slowly, painstakingly, to roll out the road.

As he moved, bent over and intent, he became more adept at smoothing the surface. Murmurs of approval became expressions of civic pride behind him. He heard people talk about the trips they would take, the sights they would see. The voices grew competitive, then demanding, urging him to work quicker. He replied that the utmost care had to be taken with the placement. It could not be rushed. When he saw the rocky hillock ahead, he felt the stone in his trouser pocket throb hot against his leg and he hesitated.

Before he could react, the roll was snatched from his hands. He called out but already a gang of boys was making a game of hurrying the road up the slope. One, his survey assistant, gained the lead by leap—frogging over a rival. The boy flung the fabric roll ahead of him in the air such that the surface settled in heaves and wrinkles. When it disappeared over the top, the rod boy scrambled after it.

"It's supposed to go around the hill," cried the apprentice but no one was listening. He stood watching the parade trudge doggedly up the new surface to the top. "This is out of bounds. It's not part of the route."

From the top of the hill a woman screamed, "My boy!" A man was holding her to keep her from descending. Others covered their mouths and pointed down the slope. The apprentice pushed his way through until he was at the summit and could see the progress of his road.

Below, the blacktop ran crazily down the incline to a point where it ended in a bottomless hole. Boys lying flat on their stomachs were peering down into it from as close as they dared. A man began hauling them away by their collars. The ringing wail of the inconsolable mother clashed against the inflated tones of the Burgomaster and for the second time that week the earth shrugged its shoulders.

As so many strange stories do, Apollonia's began on a Sunday. After church, and after the dishes of the midday meal had been cleared away, she accompanied her mother to a natural spring high in the Gatineau Hills north of her father's bakery on St. Joseph Boulevard in Hull, Quebec. They borrowed the half—ton pickup truck of her uncle, her mother's brother, Raoul Lachance who ran a local brasserie and had helped her father, Jaroslav Putim, establish his business when he first arrived, penniless, from Montreal. At the spring they filled twenty—five five gallon petrol cans with the pure, naturally carbonated water which her father insisted on in his baking, and loaded the containers onto the flatbed of the Ford. This was the day she itched for throughout the whole yeast—full, flour—dust choking week. From before daybreak each morning until supper each evening she worked in the shop, serving customers in French and English, sweeping up, sometimes mixing, sometimes struggling with the dough beside her mother's great pounding fists and forearms, but always yearning for Sunday afternoon. It was on this particular outing to the spring that she met Bernie Aucoin, Emmett's natural father. It was 1956 and she was eighteen.

Emmett's grandfather had had the foresight as a young man to leave Prague in 1936. He worked his transatlantic passage in the galley of a Cunard liner out of Marseilles and in New York he used a forged American passport, the service of an enterprising cook, to slip ashore. Because he spoke better French than English, he headed north, crossing by bus into the Dominion of Canada near Champlain, New York. The combination of U.S. passport, fluent French, and rogue's charm was more than enough to snow the Canadian border guards who would not be put onto wartime alert for enemies of the Commonwealth for another two years.

He worked in restaurants and bakeries in Montreal until the war broke out. That year he met Raoul Lachance, a baking supply distributor who was making a small fortune filling government wartime contracts.

"What are you wasting your life here for, Putim?" said Lachance. "Come to Ottawa and work for me. Now's the time to think about setting up your own bakery. You'll be a rich man in no time."

"I haven't enough money to buy my own business," Apollonia's father replied. "Besides, surely the big bakeries—"

"— don't know how to get the war contracts yet. I do. It's who you know in the West Block that counts. If you're fast enough, you can sneak in before Weston has finished buttoning his fly!"

Lachance helped Jaroslav put a down payment on a prop-

erty in Hull and within six months Boulangerie Putim was producing a hundred loaves a day for overseas transport. The Old World sourdough bread was in the highest demand because its natural yeast, which worked without the need for added sugar, kept the product fresh tasting for as long as ten days after baking. To meet the demand, he bought three new ovens. He had just enough time to marry Gabrielle, Raoul's sister. Soon he was a father and sole employer for a staff of twenty whose output doubled every year until 1942. That year disaster struck.

In March of 1942 Boulangerie Putim was audited. Jaroslav was told that this was routine for all businesses holding contracts with the Government of Canada; some people had been found abusing their special relationship. The first thing the auditor discovered was the fact that the mortgage for the bakery was held not by Uncle Raoul as Jaroslav assumed but by a man named Jean Guy Bastien, known to his friends as "P'tit Guy" and to the local constabulary as the head of Hull's largest crime family. Bastien was wanted on a vast number of counts ranging from prostitution to bank robbery. Uncle Raoul had been P'tit Guy's collector only.

Jaroslav's citizenship was the next fact called into question. As the supplier of an essential service to the war effort, he was exempt military duty. But once that service became suspect as it did when the shadow of "P'tit Guy" fell across it, he was again eligible for active service. The problem was that he had not yet gained landed immigrant status.

"What man has time for such things when he is trying to better his lot on this hard earth?" he argued.

And because he had entered the country under a false passport, he posed a further problem. He should be deported, they told him, but because he was a Czech national the authorities could not send him back to enemy—occupied territory.

The solution was as close to a compromise as a bureaucracy could muster. First, the contract to supply bread to Allied troops overseas was nullified. Second, he was granted Canadian citizenship and drafted into the Canadian army. Finally, Boulangerie Putim could continue to operate only as long as further links to Jean Guy Bastien were severed. This meant transferring their monthly payments to the federal government which became their benevolent interim mortgagor.

Apollonia's mother continued to run the business while her husband served out his sentence with the "Vandoos", the French—Canadian Twenty—Second Regiment. The staff having been laid off, she was left with only Uncle Raoul to help her. By then Apollonia was four and her mother was pregnant again, this time with twins, Otto and Lukas. Gabrielle was allowed to pay herself a meagre salary for household expenses, but any profit had to be put back into the business. The first year of her husband's absence was a black, mean time.

In 1944 P'tit Guy emerged from hiding in northern Quebec to sniff the air of Hull. Much was due him since his absence and he was in a collecting frame of mind. Luckily for Gabrielle, he was nabbed by police in the Green Room of the Chaudiere Golf and Country Club the night before he was able to visit Boulangerie Putim which, it was rumoured, was no longer making its mortgage payments. When he heard the whole story of the appropriation of the bakery by the government, the gangster became obsessed with the wrong done to him in his absence. From his jail cell he plotted his revenge.

When the war ended, Jaroslav returned to find his bakery thriving under the stewardship of his wife, who was smart enough to keep her brother at a distance until she was certain her husband's anger was dissipated. The business finally was doing well enough that she had been able to increase the monthly mortgage payments; they were told that if they could maintain these, ownership might be theirs within five years.

Apollonia and her brothers grew up knowing the radiant warmth of the ovens, the vinegary smell of sourdough loaves growing, the long days of their parents' ceaseless labour, and the sound of three languages intermingled. In the shop and at home they spoke mostly French but attended an English school at the insistence of their father who could see just how pervasive was the culture of America. He himself refused to learn English, a clear expression of his stubborn Czech attitude toward being subsumed by the dominant group. With haughty irony he associated himself with the defiant underdog Quebecois, who had said no to an English war, but insisted his children have every opportunity in this vast new country. And so, whenever they were home, the radio was on and tuned to the English CBC station from Ottawa. Alone with his God or his own wrath, though, Jaroslav Putim's prayers and curses were always in the language of his homeland.

"WHAT MAN HAS TIME FOR SUCH THINGS WHEN HE IS TRYING TO BETTER HIS LOT ON THIS HARD EARTH?" HE ARGUED.

Apollonia had no doubt that her father's reaction to Bernie Aucoin was a silent Czech curse. When she brought him up to the apartment above the shop that first time, he said nothing. It was not a good sign.

He recognized Bernie as being one of Bastien's people. Apollonia had an idea what he did for a living: deliveries, petty theft, fencing stolen goods, that sort of thing. But she was too much in love. He was so handsome with his light hair and his deep, deep brown eyes — Emmett's eyes — and full lips. He had a way of letting his cigarette dangle from the corner of his mouth when he talked that made her crazy for him. His hair fell in a shock across his forehead and he would look at her sideways with a pretend snarl about his lips. Oh, what was she supposed to do? Then he'd smile all those straight gleaming teeth at her and it would be all she could do to remain standing. When they were alone he sang to her: Sinatra, Elvis, Dean

Martin, all of them, only he sang their songs better than they did. He could have had a huge career in music. It's true.

She loved him. There was nothing she could do about it. Once in a person's life, if she is lucky, she will have a love like this. Nothing could make her turn her back on Bernie Aucoin, not even his sideline, the things he did for other men. He was good at what he did and was proud of the service he offered. Dental hygiene being what it was (or was not) in Bernie's family, he was at the age of eighteen without any of his original teeth and he used this deficiency to his advantage with certain of his regular male customers, one of the more regular among whom was Uncle Raoul. Jaroslav had seen Bernie from time to time at Raoul's. Apollonia decided even before the formal introduction of Bernie Aucoin to her father that she would defy any ban he might make.

"I love your daughter, sir," said Bernie with gravity. "We would like your permission to marry."

This was too much for Jaroslav. "What are you asking me? Do I know you?" he roared. "Daughter, what kind of nonsense is this?"

"You know me, Mr. Putim. You have seen me before and you know my employer."

"That snake! I am about to be sick right here. Apollonia, my sweet one, do you know what this boy is? He is scum. Send him away. Never see him again. Trust your father in this."

"I love him, Papa. I'm going to marry Bernie."

"Marriage? You're too young to get married. Ask him what he does for a living. Go ahead, ask him."

"That doesn't matter to me, Papa."

"I'm going straight, Sir. When we're married I'm going to join the army."

"Ha! The army?" She knew what her father thought of the armed forces. "What next? Daughter, you marry this… this viper and you are dead to me."

"You don't mean that, Papa."

"I'm leaving Bastien and Hull behind, Mr. Putim. I love your daughter with all my heart."

"You're dead to me. Both of you."

"Papa!"

"Get out!"

She moved out of her parents' house and in with Bernie the next day. In her new situation two things became immediately clear: Bernie had not the slightest intention of becoming a soldier and his renunciation of P'tit Guy Bastien was pure performance. Quickly pregnant, she spent her days in the tiny Ottawa apartment waiting while Bernie continued to work for the gangster, who in turn continued to work the threads of his web from the confines of his cell. All business proceeded normally until Bastien learned of their proposed marriage.

It was business to Bastien, more the correction of a bookkeeping mistake than murder. That Bernie was the auditor, though, added that touch of ironic justice Bastien loved to weave into his tapestry. Justice served and loyalty tried in a single act, Bastien delivered his spare economy of revenge.

It was a rare late fall morning so bright, the sky so blue it hurt her eyes to look into it too long. She was quite close to her due date. Bernie was gone when she awoke, which made her sad because they had fought the night before and slept apart, she in the bed and he on a folding cot. She did not understand why Bernie was suddenly so cold and distant. He made her feel alone even when he was with her. She felt vulnerable, wanting so much to make up with him in the light of day. But he was gone.

From the apartment she walked west along Rideau Street until the stone buildings of Ottawa rose before her: the Chateau Laurier where Bernie promised they would stay on their wedding night, the railway station from where they would depart the next day (or maybe the next) for a honeymoon in Quebec City, a tidy European—style red sandstone building with its handsomely arching windows just beyond the Cenotaph, the gothic turrets and gargoyles of Parliament Hill. Her destination that morning was a lookout behind the Center Block, just west of the elegant Library of Parliament, from where she would be able to look across the Ottawa River to Hull. The bakery was hidden from view behind the E.B. Eddy factory, but she gazed across at length all the same. In the bright light and cold air, as she imagined what her home looked like from that distance atop the cliff, beyond the white water churning past the island of logs that sat in the stiller parts, a hole opened up inside her. It felt as if her baby were climbing down out through her taut belly. She gripped the wrought iron railing that kept her from falling to the rocks below, and wept, her body trembling, her wailing lost to the wind and the screeching gulls. That she could not even see her home from across that chasm shook her all the more. She heard the gulls scolding her, knew she was still just a child, unsure of anything anymore, frightened and ashamed, uncertain about Bernie and marriage and, more than anything, motherhood. Cut off from her home by pride, by fear of her father, by ignorance of his deep love for her, she pulled herself closer to the railing. There, behind the seat of the nation's government, the future Emmett Goodfellow and Polly Marsden almost ceased to be… but for the wrath of P'tit Guy Bastien.

Her eye was drawn up and away from the sickening drop, first by the sound of thunder and then by a darkening pillow of smoke much denser than the factory's issue. Her gut told her that something terrible had just happened, something directly marring her life.

Uncle Raoul found her packing her things back at Bernie's apartment and told her the news that her brothers had been killed by the blast which destroyed the bakery. How she mourned for them, a wrenching, draining wail against Raoul's chest until she was emptied of all feeling. She mourned for Bernie, also, because she knew he was going away forever, felt it as heavy as her full bladder in the morning. That was one of the last times she saw her uncle, envoy from her parents whose door was now shut to her forever.

Her parents survived the bomb because they had been at the ovens in the basement when the blast tore the front off the

building, while the twins minded the shop upstairs. From a window at street level Gabrielle saw Bernie Aucoin running away across St. Joseph. No balm could sooth their anguish nor their rage. To see Apollonia then would have destroyed them, she knew.

The last time she saw her uncle Raoul he told Apollonia the unofficial story of Bernie's death. Raoul had seen it all. Bernie surfaced again in Hull after two weeks of hiding near Buckingham. His death in Raoul's tavern, affectionately known as The Whip because it had been the watering hole of the Conservative Party house leader in the forties, is a matter of public record. On the night he died, Bernie had contracted to provide a particular service for a friend of his dear friend, Raoul Lachance. Also present in the bar were members of a United States Marine Corps troop that had performed in a special Christmas ceremony at Government House earlier in the day. The Americans were flying back to Washington in the morning and were intent on spirited celebration.

Two of the Marines followed Bernie and Raoul's friend back to Raoul's office because they had been trained to search out and destroy undesirables. They burst in on the pair, the soldiers expressing their outrage in the only way they knew, which was to break the men's necks with deadly holds as they had been taught. Then they ignited between the soldiers and the other patrons a brawl, into the midst of which they dragged the bodies to better disguise their act of execution. The brawl was cited as the official cause of death. It was that night that Uncle Raoul became such a rabid anti—American.

The few weeks prior to delivery Apollonia spent with friends of Uncle Raoul, people who were kind but aloof, almost fearful; they had heard what had happened to Bernie and chose to keep a distance. They got her to the hospital in time but made it clear that there would be no room for her and her baby back at their house. Their last gesture of kindness was to provide her with a bible, a nightgown, and the address of a hostel for single mothers.

She was so confused and exhausted after giving birth and giving up her child that she walked away from the hospital too soon. It took her an additional week to recover in a shelter for women in the basement of a church on Elgin Street. The iron frame beds, with their Canadian Army red and grey blankets, were filled with women and girls like her, many of whom were recent arrivals from Europe. All were convalescing, if not physically, then in recovery from an exhaustion of spirit. Their children were omnipresent, an unraveling chaos of play in the restricted space, each laugh or cry sticking her with the sharp end of her loss. By the time she would leave, she would know all about charity, defeat, surrender, poverty, boredom, and Jesus. Weak, emotionally battered, but with critical time to think, Apollonia constructed her strategy.

First, borrowing a word from her benefactors, she would have to be reborn. She could no longer function as a victim, not in this country that knew so little about what it was to be a battlefield. This point was reinforced by each woman she talked to: no one loves a victim, least of all an innocent one.

"Your world was blown apart? You lost your family and child? Your lover? Tell me about it, girl. Tell me something I don't know," said a Jewess who had lived the war years in a secret closet in a farmhouse in Poland. Her entire family, fourteen people, perished at Dachau.

"What are you going to do about it now, girl? Are you going to lie down and die?" asked another.

"You are alive. Your baby is alive. Think of that. You Canadians do not appreciate how good you have it. This is a good place to grow, but you don't appreciate your freedom," scolded a woman newly arrived from Hungary. "If I could write, I would write a letter to the newspaper stating just that. Canadians, don't take your freedom for granted, it would say."

Apollonia could write and the germ of her future vocation took hold there with that woman's words. She decided that she would make her living writing. The truth and the pen would liberate her and make her a woman of substance. Her chosen path was one paved by her resilience and lighted by her naivete, the two of which she would blend into her signature. All she needed was a place to call home. As you have seen, dear reader, she found it.

"YOUR WORLD WAS BLOWN APART? YOU LOST YOUR FAMILY AND CHILD? YOUR LOVER? TELL ME ABOUT IT, GIRL. TELL ME SOMETHING I DON'T KNOW."

Lewis Goodfellow's neighbour across the street was Joseph Greenberg, then Deputy Minister of Labour and later Chairman of the Board of General Foods of Canada. The house, Lewis's exclusive design for Greenberg, was unique among the ubiquitous brick houses of the Glebe. It was a low, two—storey, windowless art deco fortress surrounding on three sides a sky—lit atrium. Off the back bedroom was Greenberg's office, a glass cylinder accessible only by a spiral staircase that led down from the suite above. All the living was done on the upper floor. Whenever Apollonia stayed there overnight to babysit, which she did often, she slept downstairs with two aged and putrid poodles in a small room off the entrance on the ground floor where, out the window and across the atrium, she was able to watch this other great man at work.

Greenberg's children called her Polly. What little of the man she saw she liked.

"How can you stand him, Polly?" the eldest girl asked her one evening. "He's always yelling."

"You should honour your father. Be proud of his accomplishments. You are too spoiled." They all knew too well the story of their father's rise from the squalor of Montreal's east end to Ottawa's inner sanctum.

Greenberg liked Goodfellow's new housekeeper also and was careful to bellow a little softer whenever she was around.

Ellen Greenberg especially warmed to her. The two of them fell into the habit of having coffee together after the men had left for work and the three older children for school. They would put Emmett and little Natalie in the same playpen together. Oh, the planning! And Emmett thought it was all of his own choosing. Polly could always count on him to fall asleep in Ellen's sunny upstairs kitchen when all other locations failed.

"How is he treating you? Is he paying you enough?" Ellen would ask her.

"He beats me every day. A dime a day and all the stale crusts of bread I can eat."

"I'm so glad," said Ellen. "I was starting to worry."

"He's all right. I think he's beginning to break out of his shell. He treats me more like a daughter or a grown—up niece. So formal all the time."

"Maybe he likes you? Maybe he has intentions?"

"Don't be silly. That blue bleeder? I don't think so."

"He's not a blue blood, dear. He's just a lonely man who is very good at what he does and puts up an ornate facade."

Something in Polly reminded Mrs. Greenberg of the person she herself had been… or was supposed to be; she could not quite decide which. In her bright kitchen she talked to the young woman about her life, her marriage, and her faith. Her life, she said, was unfolding without mystery; her marriage defied logic and current trends; and her faith lay in a shambles at her feet. But there in her sanctuary bathed in the smells of matzos baking, deli meat, old dog, and expensive perfume, Ellen encouraged everything.

"Will you amount to anything? Of course you will amount to something. Just look at you. A woman of means someday. Substance. You won't be nursemaid all your life, you know. Write? Of course you will write."

Ellen herself did not write but was enamoured with the thought the instant Polly revealed her dream. Although her reading ran to easily digestible fare, Ellen had a keen sense for what would sell, regardless of the product or the market. Immediately she set to work to find the proper medium.

"Fiction?" she said. "No, not in this country. You'll die a pauper. A journalist? Perhaps, but there must be elbow room, full expression for your character. We will find you a forum. And a name. Polly Putim. No," she said, "too much spray, enough to bring back the spittoon! What you need is a moniker your readers will remember. How about Marsden? Polly Marsden. There's a label with distinction. Now who won't be reading Marsden some day?"

Polly could not tell her that it was Joseph and not Ellen who was most formative in her writing. Whether he was playing snooker with Lewis or mounting the stairs of his own home at the end of the day, Greenberg broadcast his loathing, his predictions, and his humour to every corner. Natalie and her siblings may have learned early to ignore him, but Polly listened and in time became bold enough to ask him questions about the larger world. He told me what was wrong with Canadian politics ("Too much damn power in the hands of the provinces, I tell you, and remember where you heard this first: watch out for Quebec!"); what would save the country from economic ruin ("Listen to what C.D. Howe said: open up wide to the Yanks and keep the doors open."); the problem with young people ("They're too spoiled or stoned to do an honest day's work."); and the secret to success ("Work until your ass falls off, then pick it up and work some more.").

One night, after Emmett fell asleep, she made herself a mug of cocoa, which she plunked down beside a tattered Webster's Collegiate dictionary, and began to write a letter to the editor of the Ottawa Journal. For Polly Marsden, that was the beginning.

Many years later, when she thought he was meddling overly much in their son's life, Polly told Lewis a story.

"When I was a little girl, my mother used to sing me a French song about a woman whose lover was lost at sea. Every day the woman would walk down to the shore to watch for his fishing boat. Years passed and the boat never came in. Eventually, she gave up and married the rich man, a persistent suitor all during the time of her first love. This man owned the town's gold mine where most of the men who did not fish worked. One day she went to visit her husband at the mine and saw her lover working there. It was a miracle.

"`Why did you not tell me you were alive?' she asked.

"The man explained that it had been the rich man who had launched the search, refusing to give up until he found the wreck of which the lover was the only survivor.

"`I owe him my life,' he said.

"`I will divorce him,' said the woman.

"`You cannot do that, for I have given my word that I will abandon my love for you forever.'

"`Break your word,' said the woman. `Surely your love for me is greater than a gentleman's agreement.'

"But he would not go back on his honour.

"Without hope, without love, she threw herself down the mineshaft to her death."

Lewis said, "That is a terribly sad story. What made you think of it?"

"I don't know. I was thinking about manipulators who think that they can pull the strings of other people's lives. P'Tit Guy Bastien for one."

"That's unfair," he said.

"All right. Then let me tell you another one. This story is about a young woman who murdered her lover. Murder. Yes, that is the only word that fits. I could have prevented the death of Bernie Aucoin but did not. It is this way, you see. I knew that Bernie Aucoin was in Hull the night before he died, because a cousin of his, Chantal who worked as a waitress at Brasserie Lachance, came to tell me after her shift was over. She was a young gossip who knew what people were saying

about Bernie, that he had delivered the bomb to my father's bakery. More titillating to this little slut, though, was what Bernie did as a sideline with men in lavatories and private rooms. She could not wait to see me scandalized by the depravity of it. Before she left, my little cousin warned me that she had seen some soldiers in Brasserie Lachance that night and they were talking about doing serious damage to fairies.

"I pretended to be outraged and incredulous when Chantal concluded her sordid gossip. "Apollonia, O Apollonia. It's the worst. Your Bernie a whore. It's too shameful to think about. I'm so sorry. You must be dying inside." She wished I was dying, the little snot, but I wasn't going to give her the satisfaction of seeing my shame. What she did not know was that I had been aware of Bernie's other business for as long as I had known him, but never let on to him or anyone else. It seemed important to him that I not see him in that way. But I was not stupid. I knew what people were saying.

"Chantal, the little spy, was not the only one who could snoop around. I found out that some of the whores who worked our neighbourhood felt Bernie was robbing them of clients. Bernie was what you call a born entrepreneur, a true capitalist. He saw a need in the market and filled it. He was good at what he did, the best. I did my research. Like the most skillful of therapists, he was able to put his clients quickly and completely at their ease. Great Gums they called him, The Toothless Wonder. Studied and detached but never clinical, Bernie's talent was his ability to disappear from the space, to allow the client to float weightless in the warm salt bath of his own reverie, to be a moist, pulsing stricture that demanded nothing, gave all, moved intuitively and sympathetically. To all the men in their ravening need, Bernie gave. Apparently he gave better than the girls did.

"When the Marine colour guard began frequenting the bar, the whores saw their chance to eliminate Bernie. They could accept competition from their own kind but from a man — never. If the soldiers wanted fairies to munch on, the girls whispered in their ears, they'd come to the right place."

Polly shuddered, a sob rising from deep within her.

"Bernie… I could have warned him. But my anger burned. He had torn a gash in my world, cut me off from my past. I would never see my brothers or my parents again because of him. My feelings were all that mattered. Me. I had to protect myself, I thought, and my baby inside me. He had abandoned me, not that I was without hope. You see, I was young and saw myself as a lustrous vessel. All the world was inside me. My family nestled safe in my womb. That was all I needed. Bernie, forgive me, but it was too late for you, my love."

"I have a confession also," said Lewis.

Polly stirred and looked over at him.

"My story is about a man who borrowed a baby and never gave him back. I don't feel sorry for what I did. It was a free transaction. You and I were willing participants making free choices and I have come to love you as I would a wife.

"But my secret," he continued, "is that, far from being a practical joke on Nadia, bless her sodden soul wherever she is, bringing home the baby was my last ditch attempt at a patch job. Eleventh hour and all that, but a gesture nonetheless. The damnable thing of it is, I could not drop the charade for one short moment. All it would have taken was for me to say what I wanted. But no. I was court jester to the end, pretending my glee when she packed it in. Putting her on the wrong bus. Propping up appearances that I could get along without her.

"I think it was the sound of her name I fell in love with first. She was a match for me… even more. She was not going to put up with me and I did not blame her. But why did she take it for so long? Why didn't she once just stand up to me, slap me in the face, tell me to bloody well stop? Surely she saw through me. I needed her once, just once to put down the drink and hold up a torch to my face. That's all it would have taken."

"There, don't say any more. We have both said too much. We must let go of our regrets," she said. "It is the only way."

Then she leaned over and kissed him and turned out the light.

Don Lee

gaudier-brzeska

i had a chilling thought last night
reading this book by ezra pound, a memoir of
henri gaudier-brzeska, the
sculptor, who died in 1915 age 23
in the trenches
the thought was (& here i paraphrase)
that if a man lived well,
he will know by 30 that
his best days are behind him

i turned 32 in november

reading pound, looking
at gaudier's young, intense,
amused, dead (for 79 years) face
i scribbled one word
on the back of my hand
so i wouldn't forget it:

hurry

time off w/pay

payday here again
just in time as usual
i have almost never
had more money
coming in
than i could run through
before i got more

once: in california, for 6 weeks
hanging out while the airforce
decided whether to keep me
or boot me
but paid me just the same
about 4 hundred bucks a week
just to get up in the morning
& call in
& say hi

my wife & i worked on our
tans in the backyard, watched the
palm fronds stir in the light june breze
ate fresh peaches off
our rented trees

i wrote 75 pages of a novel
about a bookstore owner based
loosely on the writer philip k. dick
who begins to experience
surreal happenings in his life
like falling in love w/ a
19 year old
&
an alien invasion
of bodysnatchers from a
distant galaxy
who resemble giant
kafka-esque cockroaches

i never finished the novel
my wife divorced me
the airforce booted me out

i think if i really stretch
it, this paycheck
will probably last
me till
about wednesday

Robert Wu

March 2 In the Fourth Grade, Roosevelt Elementary School, Jamestown, N.D.

I was trying
to tell my friend
about the airplanes
that could fly twice as fast
as our whispers,
but he wouldn't hear
any of it;

But then I couldn't hear
any of him
because the thundering
overtook our whispers,
and everyone in the classroom
ran to the windows

to view a white trail into the blue
until the roar faded to a murmur.

Lying in a Dark House

Walking in a dark house,
bumping into doors,

Tripping in a dark house,
blundering through a mobile,

Dancing in a dark house,
swaying in a corner,

Lying in a dark house,
singing softly in the bedroom,

Groping in a dark house,
feeling only plaster,

The moon comes through the window
like the arm of a ghost.

Robert Klein Engler

New Orleans Still Life

Moss at Midnight

A December fog settles on the square.
The bells of the cathedral strike seven.
Beneath the powered glow of street lamps
the black teeth of an iron fence comb
the fog, the way a widow, remembering,
brushes her silver hair for bed.

Jazz Parade

A parade passes the Cafe Pontabla —
two police officers on horseback,
followed by a bass drum, tuba,
and a crowd singing and dancing.
The old cook sticks his head out to see.
Someone says, “Got only one band.”
“Shit,” says the cook,
“ain’t no parade with only one band.”

Creole Queen with the Weltschmerz Tiara

Every dance bar has one.
“Merry Christmas,” she mouths,
then licks her big teeth.

Afternoon

A Dixieland band plays
in front of the cathedral.
The sunlight is warm for December.
We enjoy the music, letting
our pain roll away like the red
paddle wheels rolling down river.
Yo, Lazarus, come out dat tomb!

French Market

This is the life at the bar Gazebo.
An old, black piano player hammering
out the tune he knows best, two-thirty
in the afternoon, and we're drunk.

It's the tropical, Latin desuetude
of the place, the humidity: here is
dissipation and its cure, forgetfulness.

It's the balconies, the wrought iron grill
work, hanging ferns, the closed shutters
that have locked away a damp mask,
feathers mildewed on the soul.

D. Edward Deifer

Dear Saturday

These weeks so many now
Counting back from this frosty corner
Shut in snow-drifts of winter's windows
My time slowly falls through autumn
Content to be alone with you, Saturday
Your photo-album returns again

* * * * * *

Together we stood
In the shallows of Little Lehigh River
Those yellow wafts of light
Bouncing from our heads through trees
Wearing a comfortable sweatshirt
Careening over the tall grasses and weeds
Brown dungarees stained with earth
Our memories fade, though, my favorite one
Boondockers, with sturdy thick soles
Brings me back to where I started
Dad's old army hat shadowing my eyes

On pebbles between banks
I contemplated my soul
Caught in mid-stride with a walking-stick
A sling-shot and a pocket-knife
(all captured in a photograph)
It was a day of sunshine
When I first found peace
Panhandling springs of perpetual gold
I Danced on that river

Third Grade

Berenger's went out of business
We skipped school and bought eclairs there
My brother and I weren't allowed to eat in the school cafeteria
We would walk home for sandwiches dunked in tomato soup
It was a big deal when they built the cafeteria
In the basement of Washington School

Clay beat Frazier that year
Paul Kozman ripped out Dwight Shantz's ear
The fight spilled out into recess
Mr. Fatula broke up the fight
Principal Parks came to each classroom to calm everyone
And inquire about the missing ear
I kept a straight face and looked through my desk
When he asked me about the ear
'I don't have Dwight Shantz's ear' is all I said
Principal Parks talked to Mr. Fatula outside the door and left
Lucky he didn't ask my brother Rich cause Itchy would never lie

Gates' corner store is closed though the big window is still there
Covered with curtains
My brother and I use to buy candy there before school
Mr. Gates wouldn't let us buy anything anymore
He just let us come in cause we were friends with his son, David.
We use to listen to Dave's sister's Simon & Garfunkel records
Up in his room
It was a big deal when she got the Beatles
Itchy showed me a five dollar bill that year
He bought a box of Topp's Baseball Cards
And he got me a box of Whacky Package Cards

After school we went to the woods above the scrap metal yard
With Doni Kipler and Scott Nonnemaker
To open up all the cards
I traded half my box of cards for Scott's birthday present
A new Timex watch
Doni was showing Itchy the best rocks to turn
For salamanders and nightcrawlers

All for a look at a moldy pierogi with dried ketchup
We filled our pockets with em and went home
While I counted seconds from my wrist

Mrs. Nonnemaker called our parents
'I traded for it fair and square' is all I said
Came down to the five dollar bill
Turns out Mom musta lost it in Itchy's path
I didn't say a word, just looked at my brother
Mom took my Timex watch
Dad beat the salamanders outta our pockets
I caught one on the way to our room
Without supper
And put it in the pickle jar with Dwight Shantz's ear

Yoccos' is still there
We use to spend silver dollars we found
In the basement
Playing pinballs and eating Yocco dogs
Just me and my brother
We stopped hangin with troublemakers
We didn't want to go to Catholic School

Jim Heck

poems

Autumn Out Breath

Out breath, always there
steams against the cooler air
reminds me, wake up!

Winter Comes (III)

Fall on my tailbone
Vertical. Horizontal!
My ego slips out.

Winter Comes (V)

Children shine, sledding.
Adults complain "it's freezing"
looking at watches.

Winter Comes (VII)

Winter comes too soon
expecting youth forever,
Black then Grey then White.

Mychele

Tornado

Wind thrashing,
my window broke.
My purple curtains
mommy made, choke

in the rain. And
the door wants in.
I run to open
then my chin

hit the wall
by the dining room.
Cannot breathe,
then mother booms,

"Where are you?
Oh God." Looks out
the door to find
nothing, and shouts

again. I yell
no wind, no air
no screams, I move
to kick the chair.

She runs over,
bends down to see.
Sighs, lifts me up
"Safe, now, with me."

Low Fat Love

Pushing past my lips,
sliding past my teeth
tickling my tongue
stretching my throat

I want to swallow it all

I push all of you in
to that uncomfortable place
where I finally
feel
full.

This is as close as you allow me to come
It's the only way I can scream at you
as you get what you want
You are the only thing that I can eat without you nagging
"that's not on your diet!"

But my screams are never heard as you fill my voice
with flesh and sweat
but never dessert.

John L. Moore

Constructions

The garden hoe he pushes through the wet
cement grates on the bottom of the rusted
weelbarrow. He reaches toward the stack
of concrete blocks, where his gloves lie, rolled
into a compact mass. Inside the small,
squat trailer, I turn from the screen door
toward her voice and sounds of metal rubbing metal
as she stirs the cake batter with a fork.
"If Jesus is the son of God then your unbelief
costs you eternity. Belief costs nothing."
I listen to her, but face the open door
and watch, as Father pours the footing for our
new house. I am concerned with holding
the balance, just so, before it breaks loose again.

Little Sansbois Creek

He throws the makeshift hook of bailing wire,
dragging a slender rope, over the boat's side
and lets his hands and the thin chord conspire
for the mud-slick line on bottom. I slide
the oar into the water, pull it back,
and watch as Father pulls the cord tight.
The line rises. He grabs the canvas sack
behind him. Three swirls like galaxies at night
appear on the surface of the water.
He pulls us forward hand over hand
to the first hook and frowns like my daughter
when she discovers dead fish in the sand.
He shrugs and tosses the dying turtle under
his seat. We leave, with the excuse of unheard thunder.

About the Contributors

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is the author of *The Limit of Delta Y Over Delta X* (Goose Lane Editions, 1994), a book of short stories. His work can be read on-line in *InterText, The Morpo Review, IN VIVO, International Teletimes, Et Cetera,* and *The Blue Penny Quarterly.* [His presence in Kudzu 1.1 officially makes this an international debut for us, his being Canadian and all. –Ed.]

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lives in Chicago with his wife and two sons. His poems and stories appear in lives in Chicago with his wife and two sons. His poems and stories appear in *Borderlands, Evergreen Chronicles, Hyphen, Christopher Street, The James Wright Review, American Letters and Commentary, Kansas Quarterly,* and many other magazines and journals. He is the author of two books of poetry, *Adagio* and *Stations of the Heart* (Alphabeta Press). In 1989 he was the recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Literary Award for his poem, "Flower Festival at Genzano," which appeared in *Whetstone.*

Jim Heck *selfhelp!jim.heck@cjbbs.com*

is a 30 year old Graduate of Rutger's University College in English. His father; Captain Norman Walter Heck, Jr., died in Vietnam on December 8, 1964 when he was 2 months old, this event, other childhood losses, and his exploration of Buddhism form the body of his work.
He has had poetry published in *A Half Dozen of the Other, The Rutger's Review,* and *The Livingston Medium.* He would like to thank his wife and son for enriching his life and giving him a kick in the ass when he needs it.

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is a professional student (B.A. English/Creative Writing; M.A. English) who is currently working on a second M.A. in Southern Studies at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. He will be starting law school at the University of Arkansas in the Fall of 1995. His work (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and editing) has appeared in *On the Edge, CrossRoads, and Southern Quarterly.* He is also the Editor and Publisher of *Kudzu.*

Don Lee

lives and works in Fayetteville, Arkansas, in a tiny apartment on Dickson Street. An avid student of Philip K. Dick, Charles Bukowski, and Henry Miller, Lee spends the off-season, between trips to Martinique and the tiny European principality of Andorra, working second shift at Superior Wheel in Fayetteville. His single greatest desire in life is to see Paris. France, that is. His work has appeared in such places as lives and works in Fayetteville, Arkansas, in a tiny apartment on Dickson Street. An avid student of Philip K. Dick, Charles Bukowski, and Henry Miller, Lee spends the off-season, between trips to Martinique and the tiny European principality of Andorra, working second shift at Superior Wheel in Fayetteville. His single greatest desire in life is to see Paris. France, that is. His work has appeared in such places as *Falling Sideways, Midnight Zoo,* and *The Bay Area Pleasure Guide,* to which he contributes regularly. He is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *Anything To Get Those Panties Down* and the forthcoming (from Hyacinth House Press) *Songs of the Second Shift.* You may reach him at: Don Lee 626 West Dickson St., Apt. A Fayetteville, AR 72701

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was born in Ft. Worth, Texas, but he currently lives in lovely and scenic Fayetteville, Arkansas. He just finished his B.A. in English and plans to begin his M.A. in English at the University of Arkansas in the summer. In the meantime, he makes pizzas. He is the Assistant Editor of was born in Ft. Worth, Texas, but he currently lives in lovely and scenic Fayetteville, Arkansas. He just finished his B.A. in English and plans to begin his M.A. in English at the University of Arkansas in the summer. In the meantime, he makes pizzas. He is the Associate Editor of *Kudzu.*

John L. Moore

was orginally born in Oklahoma and raised in a million little towns in eastern Oklahoma and western Arkansas, John now lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas where he writes poetry and is a cook at Jose's Mexican Restaurant. Ole! for José's!

Continued...

Mychele *mychele@primenet.com*

has created many chapbooks of poetry and short stories since beginning to present her work in 1989. She is a technical theatre graduate from Arizona State University, last year taking the leap into playwriting, recently presenting a short one act, "Light Inside." She continues to become well known in the Phoenix poetry scene, just this month winning second prize in Sarge's Hot Haiku Contest. She is a member of the Phoenix Poetry Slam Team, and in her copious spare time, writes theatre and dance reviews for *The Ashes*, a Phoenix based arts review magazine, where she is Dance Editor.

Blake Wilson *bdwilson@ins.infonet.net*

lives on Greers Ferry Lake in the Ozarks of Arkansas. He holds degrees from the University of Arkansas and spends most of his time these days writing and playing his guitar, when he's not at work. He'll being the M.A. program in Writing at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock in the Fall of 1995. He is also the "Editor-At-Large" of lives on Greers Ferry Lake in the Ozarks of Arkansas. He holds degrees from the University of Arkansas and spends most of his time these days writing and playing his guitar, when he's not at work. He'll being the M.A. program in Writing at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock in the Fall of 1995. He is also the "Editor-At-Large" of *Kudzu* (though we haven't figured out what that is-exactly-quite yet).

Robert Wu

In A Crispy Tortilla Shell, My Life: Somewhere between Bakersfield and Buffalo, Big Bend and the Peace Gardens, lies José's Mexican Restaurant, in Fayetteville, Arkansas. There you will find one Robert Wu—employee #33—wiping down tables and greeting the guests with aplomb; while away on a hill his alter ego (dressed in a Batman suit) is yelling nursery rhymes to the deer and wondering how many miles the echoes will travel.

Other Electronic Publications of Note...

Blue Penney Quarterly is published and edited by Doug Lawson. *BPQ* is a consistently high-quality quarterly that focuses mainly on literary short stories (no genre fiction). *BPQ* also publishes original art (cover) and reviews, as well as the occasional interview. So far, *BPQ* has been a Macintosh DocMaker standalone application, but subsequent issues will be published in Adobe Acrobat PDF format (like *Kudzu*, *InterText*, *Quanta*, *Citizen Poke*, and a handful of other electronic magazines). *BPQ* is listed in Novel and Short Story Writers' Market. You can obtain a copy via FTP at <ftp://ftp.etext.org/pub/Zines/BluePenneyQuarterly> and the editors may be reached at <BluePenney@aol.com>.

InterText is a bimonthly fiction magazine that has been published by Jason Snell for five years now (a lifetime on the net). Consistently interesting (check out the Summer 1994 "Supernova" theme issue for a real treat), *InterText* sets the standard for electronic magazines. *InterText* is published in four formats: HTML at <http://www.etext.org/Zines/InterText/>, PostScript, Acrobat PDF, and ASCII-Setext. All but the HTML version may be obtained at <ftp://ftp.etext.org/pub/Zines/InterText/>. The editors may be reached at <intertext@etext.org>.

The archives at etext.org (FTP at <ftp://ftp.etext.org/> and WWW at <http://www.etext.org/> are the one-stop-shopping place for electronic publications on the Internet. If it's not archived here, there's a link to it through Jon Labovitz's comprehensive "Zines on the Net" list, updated monthly. The archive is run by a volunteer staff headed by Paul Southworth <pauls@etext.org>.