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There is nothing between you and the whetted horizon.

—ROBERT THOMAS, *Fast Angel*

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Robert Thomas / TWO POEMS

FAST ANGEL

You slip into the back seat of the old Packard.
The young man behind the wheel (Jim, I hear you say)
starts the motor and turns onto the wet macadam.
It's just the two of you now. He stares head-on
at the quarter moon, knowing he's got it worried,
gunning the car till it skips, a flat rock
over the blacktop, making that eerie blue whine,
a fast angel coming in on one holy wing.
He doesn't have to look in the mirror
to know what you're doing back there.
Something, not light, shines on your neck and instep.
Even in the scalloped leather upholstery
your body starts to recognize a pattern, a curling
resonance with its own secret form, and soon
it seizes on it everywhere: the smell of sorrel trees —
squeezed from sour leaves by the relentless
rain like hard cider from an iron press —
that hits when you jack open the window;
and the rough sheen of the air itself,
chafing your skin like a flimsy of raw silk.
Now when you look in the rearview mirror
all you see is a blur of red ricochet
off the perfect black facets of the storm
and get redder as it recedes
toward where you left me standing on the slick
crush of mica. I still feel the finish
of the chrome handle, hear the *shunk* of the door.
There is nothing between you and the whetted horizon.

MORTAL LIGHT

At the Kilauea Crater on Hawaii the magic
is on the rim. When we got there the sun
had set: an hour, like the hour before sunrise,
when light comes from nowhere, just is,
as if the world's grip on it
were frail as its grip on its own
crisp skin of air, as if light
were ours, then, and therefore mortal.
The meadow spotted with perhaps a dozen
wild flowers, as if discarded
in unfocused anger, red cigarette ash
cast out a hot rod window, their small blossoms alert
as the eyes of an erect mongoose
peering over the tips of cane:
it could be Arkansas or, no, Kentucky
but for the question-marks of steam
unraveling, incapable of recalling
what they could ever have asked
of the August air, rising
from hot rifts in the smoky glass stone
crammed with tendrils of blue grass baking. . . .
It was not a *volcano*,
it was a sixteen-year-old *girl*
counting to herself, over and over,
like a miser her coins, how beautiful she was—
the soft, dented gold,
once molten as the gold yolk
pouring out of the vulnerable, star-cut crust
luminous with the bliss of cinders
we were warned of. All we saw
was the wavering edge that kept
that perfectly jet black circle
from the riot of geckos that turned
virid against the ferns, red on the fruit.

K. D. Miller / GALAPAGOS

It is barely morning when she wakes up. She doesn't know what has wakened her. He isn't snoring the way he told her he would. He isn't even breathing loudly enough for her to hear.

She rolls onto her side and props herself up on one elbow to watch him. Gradually his outline comes to her through the dark. She holds her own breath until she hears the soft sighing of his.

He is on his side with his back toward her, one shoulder jutting up in a painful-looking point. He has pushed the covers down, and the skin of his back is chilled.

Leaning over, she whispers, "Lie on your stomach." He bats at her voice as at an insect. She repeats more softly, "Lie on your stomach."

"Whunkh?"

"It's all right. Don't wake up. Just lie on your stomach."

"Hye? Uzzeye sorring?"

"No you weren't. Don't wake up. Just lie on your stomach and let me cover you."

He humps around onto his stomach and lands heavily, face-down in the pillow.

"Turn your face to me."

"Mmmmmffp?"

"You can't breathe. Turn your face to me."

His back tenses up. She whispers, "Never mind. I'll do it." Then she puts one light hand on the back of his head, pushes the fingertips of the other hand between the pillow and his chin, and gently turns his face toward her.

She is pulling the covers up over him when he shifts sideways. He butts against her, pushing her over onto her back. Then he settles his head on her chest, moans a deep "Ohhh!" and stays there.

He is heavy. She tries to ease him off her, and can't. After a while, she puts an arm around his shoulders. She crooks her other arm around his head, resting her fingers in his hair. She is wide awake now, holding him, looking into the dark.

His scent is different when he sleeps. It is faintly bitter, as if the day's poisons are being burned out of him. His hair feels thicker too, even longer, when it is sleep-touselled. The curls tickle scratchily at her cheek. She would like to stroke his scalp, but doesn't want to wake him up.

His sleep is a precious thing, she thinks suddenly. And right now I am its custodian.

It is one of those thoughts that come to her sometimes and always make her want to do something—write the thought down, or sing it, or turn it over and over in her mind as she would turn in her hand some interestingly-shaped stone.

"His sleep is a precious thing. And right now I am its custodian." She does not actually whisper the words—just parts her lips and breathes them, barely tasting the consonants on her tongue. But he shifts a little, as if he has heard. She breathes more shallowly, willing him back into sleep.

He lies with his chin tucked down. His expression, she guesses, is petulant. She suspects he may frown, as if sleep is hard work.

The only other time she saw him this way was one evening when he fell asleep on the couch. She sat stiffly across from him in a chair, studying the things that irritated her the most—his flung jacket, his scuffed-off shoes, his stubbed cigarette. At last she got up, crossed to the couch and knelt near his face, intending to waken him and tell him to go home.

But she did not waken him. There was an earnest look on his face, and he had that faintly bitter sleep-scent. She realized she could do anything to him. She could clap her hands above his nose, scream in his ear. Make him lurch and gasp, eyes huge. Or she could get a blanket and cover him so softly he would not even feel the breath of its settling.

It was several seconds before she realized she was crying. But when he opened his eyes, he knew it immediately. He pulled her to him and breathed for a long time into the hair over her ear—in out, in out, saying nothing.

Usually, words puff out of him, white with smoke. What he's done. What he's going to do. He paces while he talks, pushing and shouldering his way. He reaches for his cigarettes with a gesture like a punch. He leaves logjams of butts in every ashtray. She thinks sometimes that his entire being must end in a small red smouldering point.

But the moment before he burst inside her, he barely moved, barely breathed. The skin of his face became taut, and his expression so tender she had to look away.

Afterwards, he whispered that he was afraid he might be too heavy for her. She kissed his temple and shook her head. She wanted to tell him that her body made a shape beneath him like cupped palms.

His breath has moistened the hollow of her neck. There is a feeling of morning coming. She can sense, more than see, the gradual lifting of the dark. He senses it too. He draws in a deep breath and raises his head. His skin parts stickily from hers. She lifts her hand, feeling his curls snag her fingers before letting go. Still asleep, he pulls away from her, turns jerkily onto his side and begins to snore.

* * *

This is her routine now: She wakes up, looks at the clock and starts to cry. She can't remember how long she has been doing it — waking an hour or two before they both have to get up, then crying quietly beside his sleeping body.

She lies on her back, taking in long, shuddery breaths. Exhaling. Letting everything run. A minute before the alarm is set to go off, she will press the button down, get up, go into the bathroom and wash her face in cold water.

It is her preparation for all the necessary smiles of the day, all the reasonable tones of voice. She doesn't know what he does to keep himself going. All she knows is that they have turned into bad actors — making gestures, mouthing words.

She remembers how easy it used to be to fight, how quick and hot it was. The edged voices, the hard stomping through the house, the fragile things rattling on the shelves. Then tears — noisy and jerky, proud of their pain, dying down into whispers, muffled at last in bed.

She swipes at the wetness trickling into her ear, and glances to the right. He sleeps with his back to her, one shoulder pulled up. In all their beds, he has always slept to her right. Once when she wondered out loud about it, he tugged her earlobe and grinned and told her they slept that way because he was right-handed.

She looks at him again, smudging tears down her face with the backs of her hands. She knows what she is doing with this looking. She is checking to see that he is still there. She almost smiles at herself.

She can never really know where he is. Not even when he's inside her. Sometimes she cracks her eyelids open and watches him through to the finish. He does look like he is running a race, his eyes fixed desperately on something just ahead, his expression close-to-tears as he slows and shudders and falls.

Is he seeing what she sees? Does he watch her sometimes and wonder where she is, what she is seeing?

She always chases after something that skims like a bird, dotting the ground with its shadow. There is a wind—her eyes tear with it—and she can never quite see what she is chasing. Then her breath catches, and the whole scene shatters.

Once they tried to tell each other. She remembers them whispering, elbows propped on pillows, glancing into each others' eyes, then away. He spoke of a warmth spreading as far as his chest and knees. That was all. Nothing about the loneliness, the disappointment she always sees on his face. So she told him that for her it is like a sped-up film of a rose or chrysanthemum bursting into bloom. Soon after that, they stopped talking and fell asleep.

She never told him what it really is for her—the lonely panting run, chasing something she cannot see. She wonders again now what it is that he never told her.

She has started to make noise. She doesn't know how long it has been going on, only that her body has taken over. Sometimes it surprises her with pleasure, pushing the sounds of pleasure out of her mouth when she is so sure she cannot, or will not. Now it surprises her with pain, pushing out the sounds of pain. She jerks with each coughing sob. She tries to cover her eyes and mouth, but her hands aren't big enough to hold in the sounds she is making.

He is awake. She feels the shifting of his weight, the warmth of his nearing body. Then his hand closing on her wrists and softly tugging.

* * *

She wakes up remembering how Indian women mourn. First they pull their earrings from their ears. Then they bang their wrists together to shatter their bracelets. At last they kneel, lean forward and softly knock their foreheads on the ground.

Odd thing to wake up thinking about. So vivid, too, like something she has just witnessed. But she only saw it on TV. Or did she read about it in a book? Or did he tell her about it?

She shakes her head to clear it. She rubs her eyes and takes in a deep, loud breath. Her whole body expands—her toes, her hair—as if she hasn't breathed all night.

She looks at the clock. Still an hour before the alarm is set to go off. She looks at him. There he is. His back. She sees it every morning.

His body. It all still intrigues her: his feet—long, thin and blue-veined, the toes thick as ginger root; his erect penis, leading him like some blind sensor. How sad and funny, this complete nakedness, as if he's forgotten to tuck something in. His body can have no secrets.

But his back is secretive this morning. She wants to touch it. She does reach out. Then she stops her hand an inch from his skin. There is something about the nearness of her hand to his back—

She pulls her hand away. She folds her arms over her chest and tries to think about something else.

Indian women in their prescribed rituals of mourning. Where did the memory come from? Is it something she discovered by herself, or did he tell her about it? She doesn't know anymore what comes from him and what from her. Hasn't known for years. Decades. Couldn't possibly put things into boxes labelled "his" and "hers."

They've grown younger together. They've started to play. Sometimes she tells him she wants to camp out for the night. So they unfold the sofabed in the livingroom and make cocoa and eat crazy things—wieners stabbed on forks and dipped in a jar of mustard they pass back and forth. She sits cross-legged on the sofabed in her pyjamas and tells him what she always tells him when they camp out—that they must have been children together. They must have played together, and slept together without knowing there was anything more to it than sleep. Because now she can't remember her life without him. He's there, at all her birthday parties. At her graduation. He's there.

He's there beside her. He hasn't moved. He isn't snoring. The skin of his back makes her think of pink marble. She shifts closer to pull his covers up. An inch away from him, she freezes.

His warmth. That's what it is. His warmth is gone, and with it his bitter, fiery scent. That is what her hand missed, what all of her misses now.

She still does not touch him. She smooths the sheet between them over and over, searching for warmth, her fingers dangerously close to him, her fingernails almost grazing his skin. At last she stops. She listens, hard. She looks, her eyes dry with effort. No breath. None.

She should shake him. Yell in his ear. But she scrabbles as far away as she can on the bed. She wants to get away from what has happened, but it follows her, enters her. She puts her hands to her breastbone and digs her nails in, trying to prise herself apart.

It's all inside her, and she has to get it out. But she doesn't know how. What are her rituals of mourning? Where does she begin?

* * *

Morning.

She doesn't know why she keeps waking up so early when it's still dark. She has stopped having the dream that sometimes used to wake her—the one about her hands disappearing, her wrists becoming smooth nubs. She used to lurch awake from that one and feel her fingers with her lips to make sure they were still there.

She looks over to the right, squinting through the dark. Then, because her hands are still numb and useless, she rolls the width of the bed to the far edge. Her eyes were right. There's nothing there but cool sheet.

She isn't crazy. He could be there. He could be anywhere. She caught sight of him on the subway just the other day, just as her train was leaving the station. He was on the opposite platform, walking along, hardly breaking stride to light a cigarette, obviously going somewhere. And about two weeks ago, she was going up the up escalator in the shopping mall, and he was going down the down, and they criss-crossed. He was carrying a shopping bag and looking at his feet. Afterwards, all she could think about was how much he had always hated shopping, so what on *earth* was in that bag?

What on earth. She smiles and edges back to her side of the bed. She isn't crazy. It's just that he might show up anywhere. He'll

never tell her, of course, never give her an inkling. One day she'll unlock the apartment door and just be putting her keys back in her purse when she'll hear a tinkling sound. She'll look up, and there will be the back of his head poking above one of the chairs on the balcony. He'll have gotten himself a ginger ale from the fridge and be sipping it. The tinkling sound will be the ice in his drink.

She'll be flustered. She'll tap on the balcony door and gesture him in. Then she'll sit across from him the way she did when they were dating. She'll have to think of things to say. *What*, for heaven's sake? It'll be like starting all over. They'll hardly know each other any more. After all, he's still sixty-five from the look of it, whereas she —

She crosses her arms over her eyes. Her hands are still asleep. She knocks them together, they make a sound like wood. She hates them when they're like this — stupid, clubby things. Rust-spotted. Worm-veined. Making her feel like she's dying by inches.

She takes a deep breath. Coffee. Might as well. Last night she got all the fixings for it together, as usual, so it's just a matter of nudging the coffeemaker's "on" button. She can do that much with the back of her wrist.

She learned the hard way to get things ready the night before. The last time she tried to make coffee from scratch in the morning, before her hands were awake, the can slipped from between her wrists and the grounds made a brown Sahara all over the kitchen floor.

She screamed at him that morning, not for the first time. Screamed until she thought she'd have to cram a teatowel into her mouth. Damn it, where *are* you, she screamed. Why can't you just *be* here?

He was supposed to be here. She used to watch old ladies stepping along the sidewalk in that careful old-lady way. Alone, or on the arm of another one just like themselves. Tight, white curls, navy polka-dotted dresses, shoes too big for the withering feet. And she used to think, not me, then give him that certain smile he always took her up on.

Coffee. Carefully, she elbows herself up into a sitting position. Then she eases her legs over the edge of the bed and rocks up onto her feet. There. Nothing broken, nothing strained. She slides her feet into her slippers, first one then the other, leaning against the wall for balance. When she is sure of herself, she sets out for the kitchen.

She figures it takes her about three minutes now to make the trip. And she has started thinking of it as a trip. Time might come when she'll have to pack provisions and a change of clothes.

She reaches the couch in the livingroom and leans on one of its arms for a moment, getting her breath back. They were always going to travel when he retired. They had a trip all planned, too, to the Galapagos. The *Galapagos*, she said, when he brought the pamphlets home. Why *there*? Well, he had been reading about the islands, he said, and thought maybe they should go. When had he been reading about them, she wondered. He never went into the library, just dropped her off and waited for her in the parking lot. But somehow he'd gotten the Galapagos into his head and had decided that's where he'd like to go.

So she had started getting books out of the library and reading paragraphs out loud to him after supper. Bits about turtles still alive that were hatched the year Napoleon was born. Huge lizards like dragons. Prehistoric birds that have no business still existing. She was just starting to get excited about it all when he had his stroke.

She has reached the kitchen. She rests against the doorframe for a minute. That's what they told her it was, anyway. They couldn't be sure, because it happened in his sleep. But that's what it looked like. Stroke. Funny word. Stroke of a whip. Stroke of a hand.

She goes to the coffeemaker, nudges the "on" button with the back of her wrist and stands waiting. When the trickle begins, she drapes her hands around the warming urn. Soon there is a pins-and-needles feeling in her palms that spreads to her fingers. She takes her hands off the now hot urn, breathing in the smell of coffee. She flexes and shakes her hands, curling and uncurling her awakening fingers. Her morning dance, she calls it.

This is always a good time, when she can open a cupboard door and put a cup to a saucer, and pour herself some coffee.

She takes her cup to the diningroom table and sits down with it. She sips. The Galapagos. She wonders if he ever got there. Maybe not. Maybe he's stuck with subways and shopping malls. Didn't somebody have the idea once that whatever you avoided in this life you'd be stuck with in the next? Sort of like getting your uneaten supper cold for breakfast?

She sips her coffee. She doesn't know. For that matter, he might be sitting across from her, eyeing her steaming cup. Maybe she should pour one for him. Or tell him to go pour his own. After all, if he could get himself a ginger ale out of the fridge, he could just as easily...

She puts her cup back down on her saucer, leans her face into her hands and laughs. She isn't crazy. No crazier than the Egyptians. Didn't they bury bowls of food with their dead in case they got hungry? Horses for them to ride? Servants? Wives, for that matter? Crowded down there.

She lifts her face from her hands and wipes her eyes with the backs of her wrists. It's just that he can't possibly be all finished and gone. Nothing ever is. Every time they made love, part of him stayed inside her until long after they fell asleep with their backs to each other. And even now, the stains of him are still in the older sheets, like ghosts.

She picks up her cup and sips her cooling coffee. Then, very quietly, she puts it back on the saucer and listens. A sound from the bedroom. Wind changing direction. Or a curtain scuffing a windowledge. Or a breath indrawn. Could be anything.

James L. Swanson / THREE WORKS

THE ALMAGEST

Morning she found him lashed to a turnip.
Sunrise make him burn for the bush.

He has begun, as will be donne,
at wooded foot, green valley.
Uphill he run, through forest come,
into the alpine, sally.

Rockrubble to glacier he tickles the ridge
on clodhopper adamantine.
Sweet liberty! The wicked itch
to press the bonedry waterspart
where the immovable moves aside,
where billypiss piddles to oceans wide.

Tripping over the lofty champlain
he drones a scrubpine ditty.

Bless the Mahotean coffee
and the Aztec chocolat.
Preserve the Fly in the ointment,
keep my belly hot.
Soft the foamy riverbed,
when all the bolt's been shot.

Deep in the bouldered abyss,
whitewater sparkle and hiss.
Blackfly buzzz,

breeze off, bud.

Shadows drag thru lofty hummocks,
downcast eyes scan granite grit.
So Skinhunter's in immanual Lemnos
when women in flocks were charmed by his looks.

Here are no women but only rocks,
saltpeter to pepper Paul's tony rot,
amatory not.

Easpoor of ostrich, noon,
a sneeze on the dusty road.

Incense of ripe Pandora.
Conjunctive limbo sidesprouts.
Olfactory bulbs and smelling salts.

Millions of comets flock pell mell.
High in the mountains

a shepherd fell.

ON THE REVOLUTIONS OF THE HEAVENLY SPHERES

Foursquare and several meals a day, our fivefodders and sexmudders went hubbubbling. Lapping each other's behind the back, stretching Hooker's loi on spelt Sealeys, pulling rank. All blamboozey eyed from hidden argentas. In brief, working awed hours. In shorts, shooting the breeze.

They wore heaven a hell ova time. From the planes of Noradco-Nozzler to the craters where livers got lillipills. Aegis ago under an avuncular bumbershoot. Handsful of worriers being taken for a leek, chanting the owed to the tundric urne. Hennypennyone preying oder profitizing mit head huncovered disfiggers the head. Many megatoons before the breakup of our nuclear family.

Groined ceiling. War an insade joke, by job. The ridgepole cracked. Yawn knave strutted around the buttress, arrayed like Sullivan in all his glories, dressed to the emcee square. Non fingo hypothico he, uzum erectus oedifuss on a giant edipussy. Einstein's asgard asa newton. Ein zwei dry fear ist argot.

Around about the decent of the oracles, he was honked till dief and dumfounded as the farmer in Adelle. (Produce by.) Gossamer inprism hymn. Has hymen many a gander since the kurds wayed in. Couldn't keep up his end of the hind. Brow falling stern, gifted with gab, he gravely gulped a glass of bitters. Them let without salts vomit up the first stone.

He was brot some yonder bread, he would not eat. Nor would he drink the water. Urpsprung the countess of Salvary, who dancing dropt her garter. Chaste? Change why to the aye and add e s p.

Wood ye be willow to gift up yr stumack while those all round are waisting theirs? Get thee behind me, Romeo. Fowl bowel. He flagged in his randy career. Chest ribbing, madam. Wash you wart. The new groom sleeps clean if the slipper fits. Haul men are crated equal. Spar the rod, spoil the bladder.

Snakes in her goldilocks. Laff can be foney, sept when yr tickled to death. Bugs in her ears. You do knead a schoolmarm to vive la difference tween rite and wrung. Incognito ergot soma.

Turn Isis. Sis in rut. Now for twinces. Wishupon it were still kosher to green more wives than one. In the stray scent of the verd. Mormon's dozen sweet superstarlets, greglorious as bingo. Double yr pleasure. Ball three. Gnawstick penumbra. Aromatic auspices and flamenoids.

Under pain of bread and spread of butter, the sun beat the wind in disrobin the rover. What'll we tell the kids? Derriere de rien.

He wired for wine. One percent flockululation, ninety-nine bottles of perspurspiration. She dialed for bread. She raised a skirt. Esau and call trump. Hirsuite? Whiskers, but not on her face.

Yeast we forget, he is risen. Waged the rugged tree. Mock my words. Hair trigger. Ramparts. The master debator went off his nut. Sirens. A moment of inertia. Swing animus. Oldest trick in the book. Who nose what evol? Bock. Take yr base.

Ex folio. They gambol in brood delight. A troywate of flint. Tinder's the knight. Such a burn of bushes. Touch wood, punk.

Yule remember what happen to the bay what cried wharf. Got dockt. But what happen to the capn who smote his doter by the ocean? Cot the flew with his pants down, dickering with nativity. Was in the end booted out of the gluckkliche farting contest. Atomic piles.

Oct, this egg is roi in the muddle.

That's the usual sign. If in doubt about what to sacrifice, two ripe melons will suffice.

ON THE LODESTONE AND MAGNETIC BODIES

Of all the firstwater nobbs of the second order ever eaten alive by mice, none was more differentiable than Bishop Hatto, who by the way sported a convincing moustache as well. A number of poor harvests during the dork ages compelled the Bishop to herd the peasants into a barn and set whole shooting match on fire.

They are like mice, only good to devour the corn.

An army of mice subsequently attacked the Bishop, drove him up a wall, and polished him off.

There's another one the English won't get.

The Latin dictionary found among the remains suggests scholarly inclinations. Cross yr eyes and string the matrix.

Then there was the soothsayer who died of laughter at having outlived the predicted hour of his demise.

My own trouble began Tuesday. I was headed for the garage to get a shot of O-2. By all vector gauges I have the spin of half a weekling. How did I know the Easter bunny had come? Because of the snickers in my ears. Whispered by what I thought were my brothers in larmes to my sisters in lay. Pass me the knock out drops, I'm drenched to the half shell. Steamed in bed, animal to animal, crooning crybaby songs over Evelyn's keel. She was a mobius stripper at the Klein Bottleneck. Who could desiphon her frumious rosetta bud?

Transplanted into the psychopompic vernacula, you could say I ran in native mode to free myself of the combines of investigation. I stopped at the lightbench to trace up some rays. In came the message. Cursors, tinfoiled agleam.

Beta Decay Central to Nuclear Burning. The Italian navigator has landed in the new world.

Myth america I loan to see you. Fly yr flagel at half staph on doupeltime. I pinched myself to see if my chips were rad hard. Discreet is my muddle name, but what in hell is all the Christian nomancclatter?

You look familiar, but I can't replace yr face.

My father was a one-lunger poised at top dead centre. His father before him was Black Jumbo. My mother was a plutonium blonde. Noticals aslanging, fantom fighters phlying, they evolved by jerks. Bateau ivre. Yea verily tho I walk thru the wallet of the shawdo of Urano I will fear no mushroom clouding my cranston. Tho they leadeth me by still detectors and maketh me lie by corporate coffer, with enough shovels you can dig where I'm coming to.

Pluck yr magic twanger, Froggy, and hold him in escrow. He's got his stations of the wires crossed on the way to Boot Hill. Sircharge him with violating Hubble's Law. Read him his columnist's manifesty, Mickey Mantic. Drain him, Bookie. Ignorance is its own excuse.

Head crash. As anybody who knows nobody knows, the missing dark matter is composed of dead brain cells. Tubular bells I hear. In one's ear and out the other's.

Remember to fall back on polynomial time when it's neither daylight nor dark. Spring forward to exponential time when it's all hands on foot. During the blind man's balmy holoday.

O captain mercaptain, sulphur us not the little children.

Patrick Roscoe / RORSCHACHS II: MUTILATION

The flies are drunk and drowsy in the African sun. Inside the house they bumble against the mesh screen all afternoon, fat and full of blood. They are content beside the web of wire that prevents them from having to vanish into the air outside. The small boy kneels on the floor of red tiles which his mother drives the houseboy to polish once a week; the scent of wax lingers in the air for days, like a reprimand. The small boy leans toward the window ledge. A pin is pinched between the thumb and third finger of his right hand. He contemplates the flies, discerning which is the fattest or biggest or most lazy. The fingers of his left hand hold the chosen fly in place, and his right hand guides the pin into its body. There is a crucial moment when the pin must be forced through a thin but hard protective skin, then a sense of relief as the silver sliver eases into soft blood. The wings of the fly beat and buzz as red liquid drools upon the window ledge. With one finger the boy paints lines and shapes. He can draw numbers, letters of the alphabet or more elusive symbols. Recently, he has learned to spell his name.

The ants are always very quick. Before the blood can begin to dry, they are marching toward the tantalizing aroma of an easy prey. Tiny, efficient teeth nibble the body of the fly, tearing away choice morsels. Some ants are too excited by such bounty to decide if they should eat the food on the spot or take it to some safer place to savour. Some are insane with greed, piling more plunder upon their backs than they can carry. The boy watches this scene carefully, intently, now and then scattering away ants he finds overly voracious. Only once do his eyes look out through the window, and then they are swallowed by the sight of a world too much larger than the small one he controls. The southern sun hits his body flat and hard, like an iron. At the edge of the yard the houseboy and gardener are each holding one end of a thick, long snake. Their Swahili words twist and tangle inside the boy's head. He cannot remember the place that he is often told is his real home.

He decides to save this fly, for no reason except this is what he wants to do. He withdraws the pin, then nudges the body away; it is surprising how after such an experience a fly can often limp away, apparently just a little more dazed than before. The other flies are unalarmed by what has occurred nearby: disaster is always far away, drone the sun and heat. Perhaps the boy will sever the head of the next fly with one quick slice of the pin. Or he will tear off only the wings, or only the legs.

He shifts his bare legs, which have grown stiff and sore against the hard tiles. He feels someone behind him. Turning, he sees Rogacion, the houseboy, staring at him with black eyes floating in pools of white. The dark skin is pulled very tightly across the high cheekbones; the face appears without expression. It is set as still as when the boy's mother shouts because the housework is not properly done. The houseboy turns silently back into the kitchen. His feet make no sound against the floor.

The boy reverts his eyes to the window ledge. Suddenly, he is sick of greedy ants and he is tired of flies that are so fat and easy to kill. He looks out the window again, down the hill that slopes toward the west. The dirt is red and hard and baked, and heat has cracked it. There are signs that the world has been broken, as if by earthquake.

There is no telephone in the apartment the boy moves into ten years later, when he learns the truth at seventeen. No one knocks upon the door; he does not see or hear other people in the building: it is very quiet. Occasionally he goes out into the cold to buy food and a few times a week attends a nearby university. He sits silently in the classroom, his face set still. Staring at the instructor, he makes no marks upon the white paper before him. He knows he is supposed to understand this language that marches into his ears; they tell him this country is where he belongs. At night cars ease down the street below his windows; their headlights crawl along his walls. He likes the rooms in darkness, when only the element of the stove glows red. He rests the blade of the knife against the electric fire, bends his face close to feel the burning heat. When the metal is ready, he presses it against the skin of his arms. He must reheat the knife several times, if he wants it to keep working. He applies it to various places on his flesh. A subtle scent rises to his nose. Later, when he switches on the light and the room jumps out at him, he will study the pattern of marks upon his arms, as if trying to interpret hieroglyphics. Often, they will seem very near to possessing some meaning he can almost remember; he will hear a foreign language that is very familiar, nearly understood. Years later, the marks will have faded into small pale spots, and when his skin is tanned they will be invisible. The boy still stands in darkness, the coils of the element continue to glow red. They will keep burning until the boy flicks a switch.

At evening the young man lights three candles, the same variety of which old Spanish women dressed in black burn beneath miniatures of the Holy Virgin or The Saviour. The thick tubes are encased within a skin of red plastic, and, as the wax burns down, fire fills the plastic with red glowing light. Three flames waver in the air that wafts into the room. It drifts inland from the Mediterranean, all the way from Africa.

On the bed the young man lies reading and drinking wine. A burning cigarette is pinched between two fingers of his left hand. His other hand continually and unconsciously worries the skin of his face, disturbing it, scratching it. When he turns off the light at last, Spanish voices reach him from other rooms, the hallway, the street. Although he understands the language well, over years of living in foreign lands he has learned to flick a switch in his head, turning any words in the immediate air into only sound. He allows the candles to burn through the night, beneath white walls bare of miniatures or photographs. Waking at morning, he looks into the mirror. His forehead is marked by perhaps ten small scratches where the nails of his fingers dug deeply into skin. They are disfiguring and red. The smell of wax is heavy in the room. He turns to see the three candles still burning. Carefully, he blows them out.

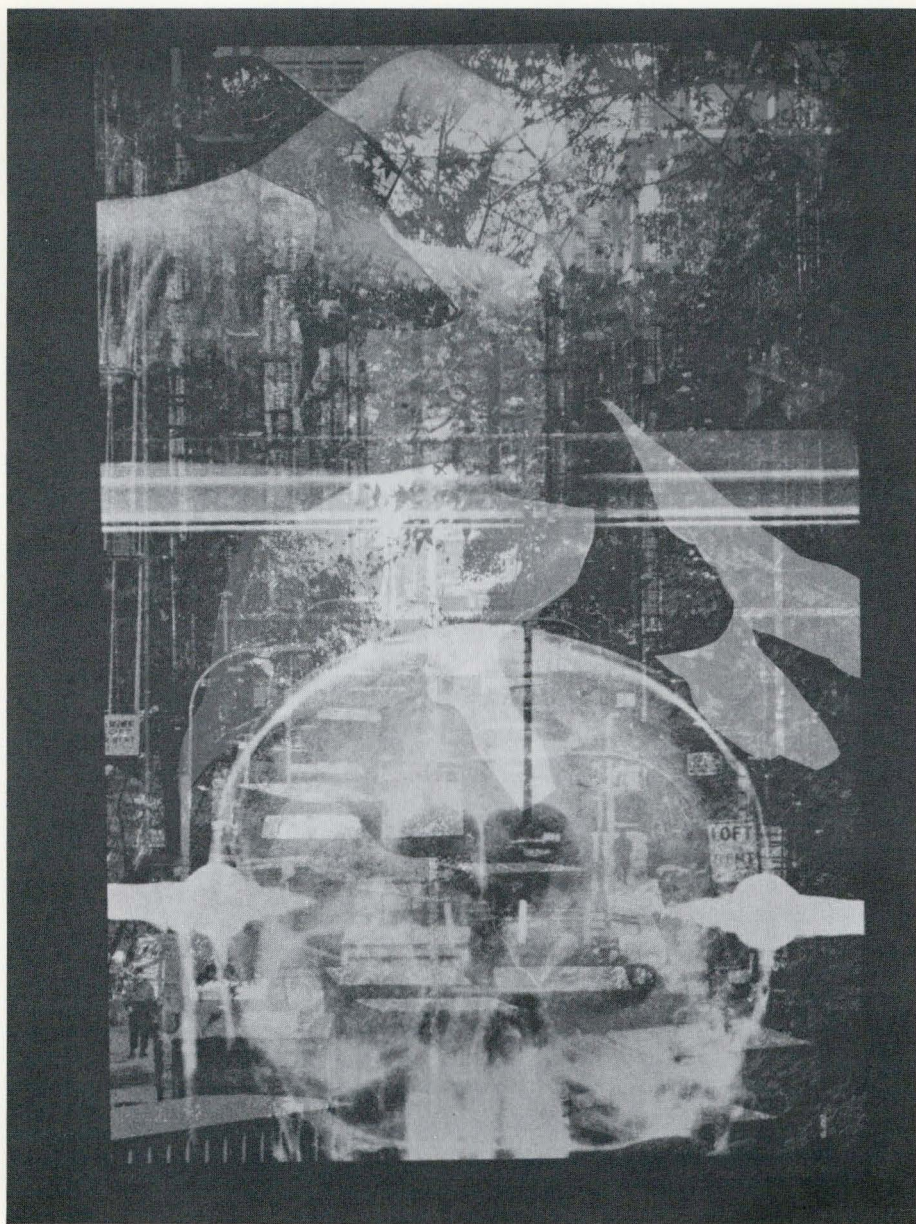
Upon his terrace the light is very clear, and the mountains to one side and the sea to the other appear in sharp focus. The November sun is almost hot. The young man leans back in a chair, tilting his face toward the sky. His eyes are closed. When they open an hour later, their vision is darkened for several moments; then sharp light forces itself painfully back into them. He looks again into the mirror. The red marks are still there, resembling the war paint of a native tribe, but they are vanishing already into the expanse of darkened skin. In a few days or a week they will be gone, and the young man will gaze into the mirror, trying to remember his name and age and place of birth.

Wayne Eastcott / from
THE PRINTED PAINTING











Ted Lindberg / CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Wayne Eastcott was chosen, recently, for a fifteen-year retrospective exhibition at the Burnaby Art Gallery, because of the Gallery's constituted emphasis on prints and printmaking and Eastcott's singular reputation as an experimenter and innovator in this area. The exhibition was titled, *Wayne Eastcott: The Printed Painting*, and set out to establish not only Eastcott's considerable artistic credentials, but to raise a few essential questions and underscore a few basic points about definitions of visual art, and how they apply (or often don't) to the myopic and rigid notions which still often prevail in printmaking circles.



The tired old debate about art versus technique still has to be dragged out of the aesthetic closet from time to time, and Wayne Eastcott is the ideal exception to a number of rules. This is, after all, what sets truly esteemed artists apart from the pack.

Eastcott's developed sensibility is simply more that of a painter than that of a craft-oriented printmaker. Throughout his career, he has seen few obstacles to broadening and perfecting his arsenal of devices for placing on canvas, paper, or other supports anything he wanted, without regard for customary practice. He is interested, most of all, in the creation of the unique object, although he frequently uses techniques which are capable of producing an unlimited number of replicas.

The manner in which his compositions are built permits him to fine-tune every aspect of the components he has brought together infinitely, until he is satisfied with balance, proportion and intensity. The appropriate musical analogy is to the range, layerings and subtleties provided by the electronic synthesizer. Eastcott is a living, breathing, visual synthesizer.

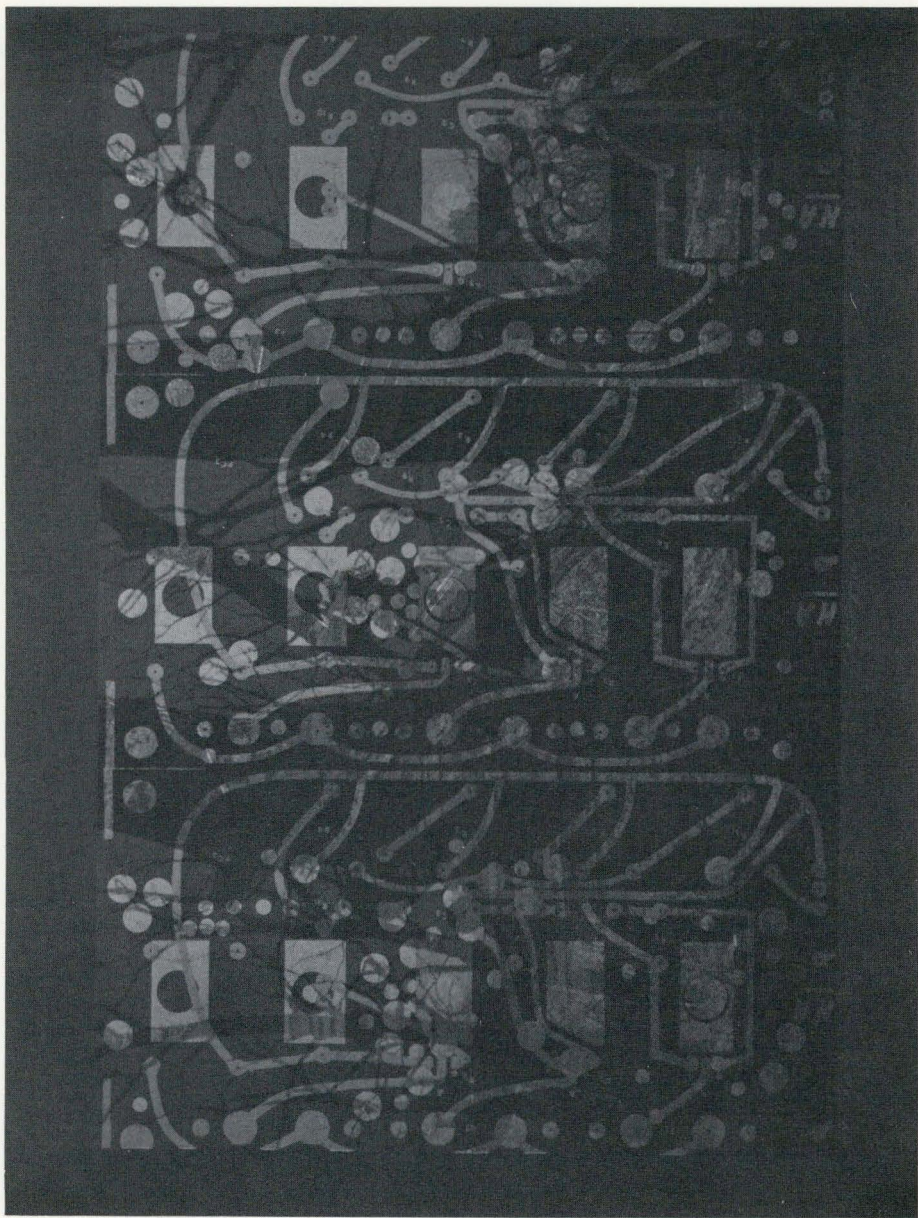
But what is Eastcott's art about? Granted that he has the equipment, literally and figuratively, to produce any kind of image, collage, finish, tonality or scale that interests or moves him, there remains what Andy Warhol used to refer to as "the art-part." This may be taken to mean the transcendental part, the experiential part which leaves us transformed in some way, however slight or profound.

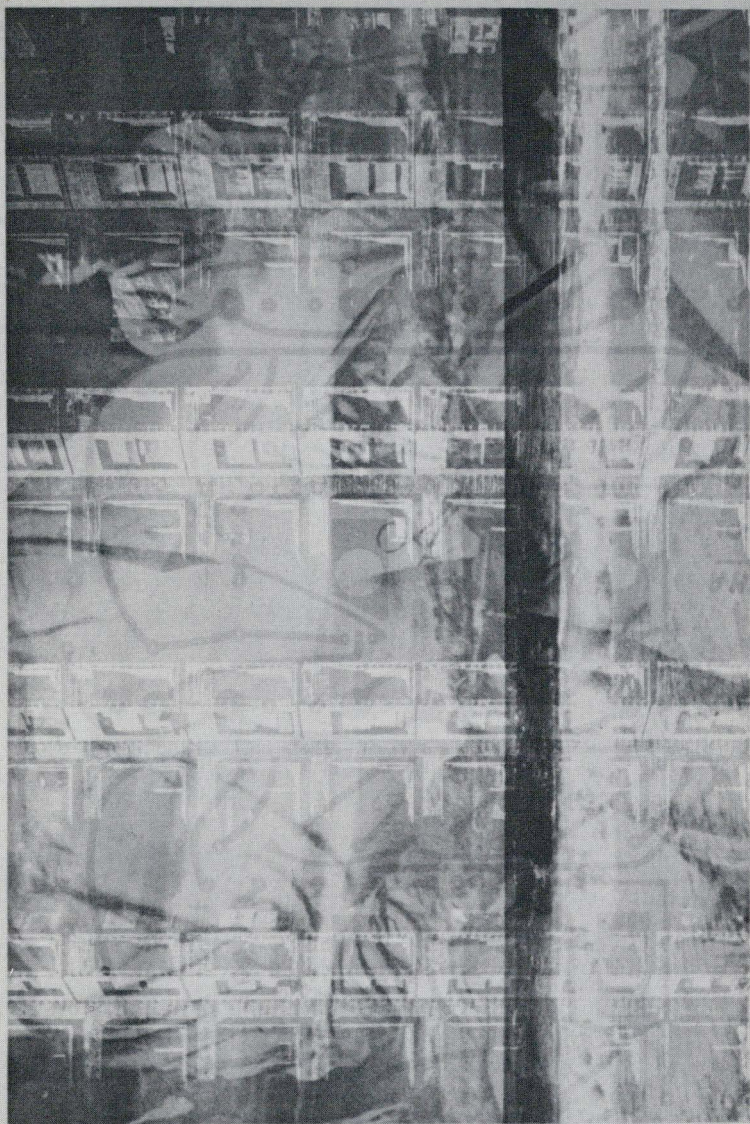
Like any artist worthy of the designation, Eastcott feels the need to invest his work with a total consciousness, a world view (and indeed, if he can, a cosmic view) which incorporates the idea of synchronous interpenetrating reality. It is the idea of "all-ness at once-ness." It is the concept of the collage, itself, which permits him to bring out-of-context images of nature into harmony with technology, to print ephemeral beauty alongside copper circuitry, to place the hand-drawn line against a screened photo-apparition. Space and time can be orchestrated like colour and surface. Throughout, he sees them all as parts of a balanced, rational, universal order.

In visual art, there is a huge difference between the terms *realism* and *reality*. In Eastcott's case, it would seem that, in pursuit of the first term, he abruptly comes up against the second, but in a revealing and not altogether overwhelming way. It is this oceanic view which he wishes to express in his printed paintings.

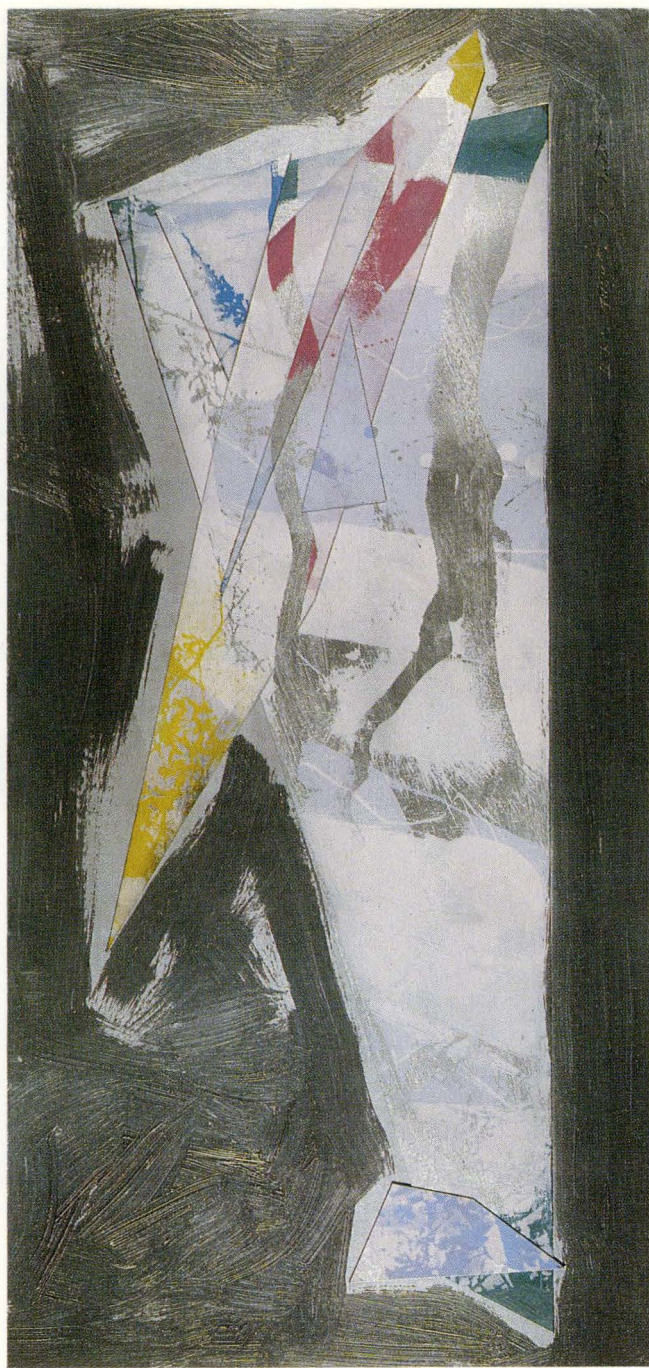




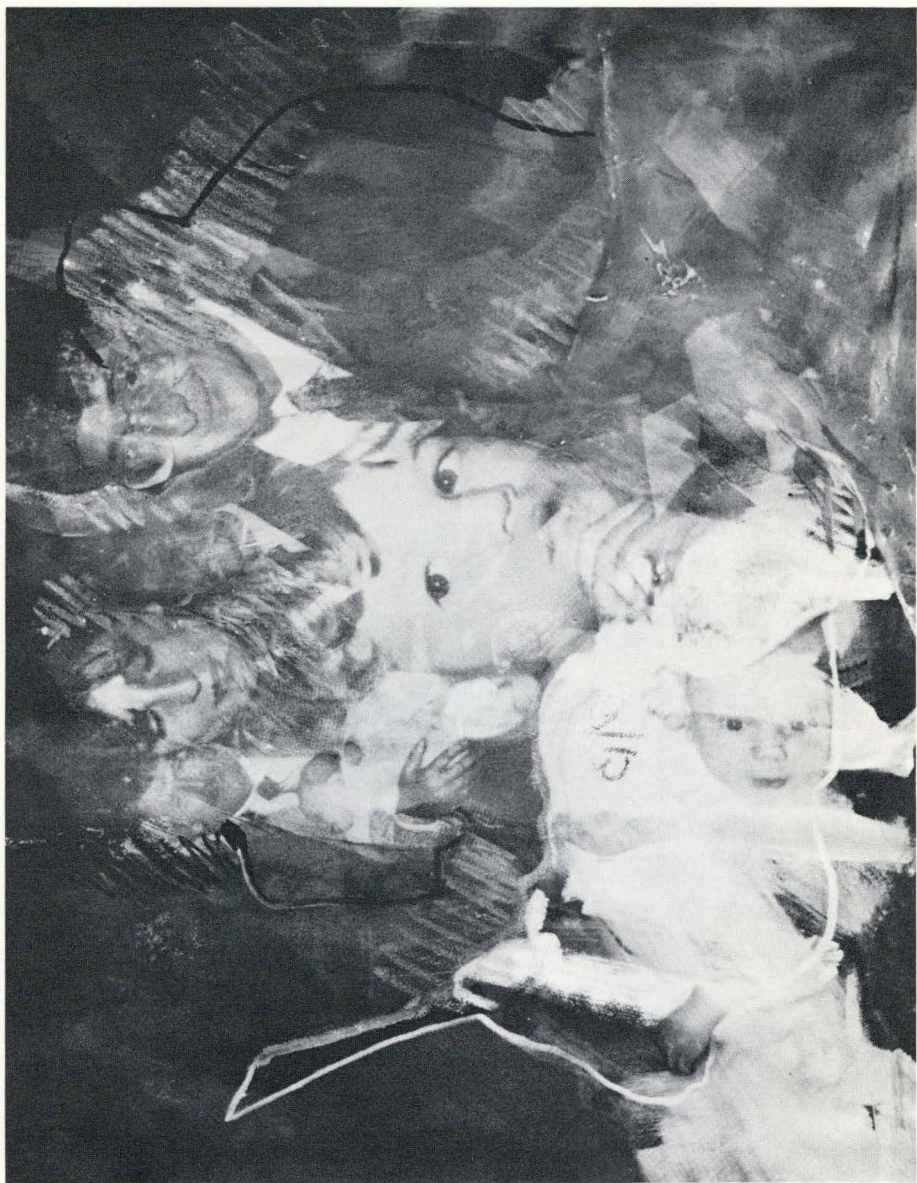


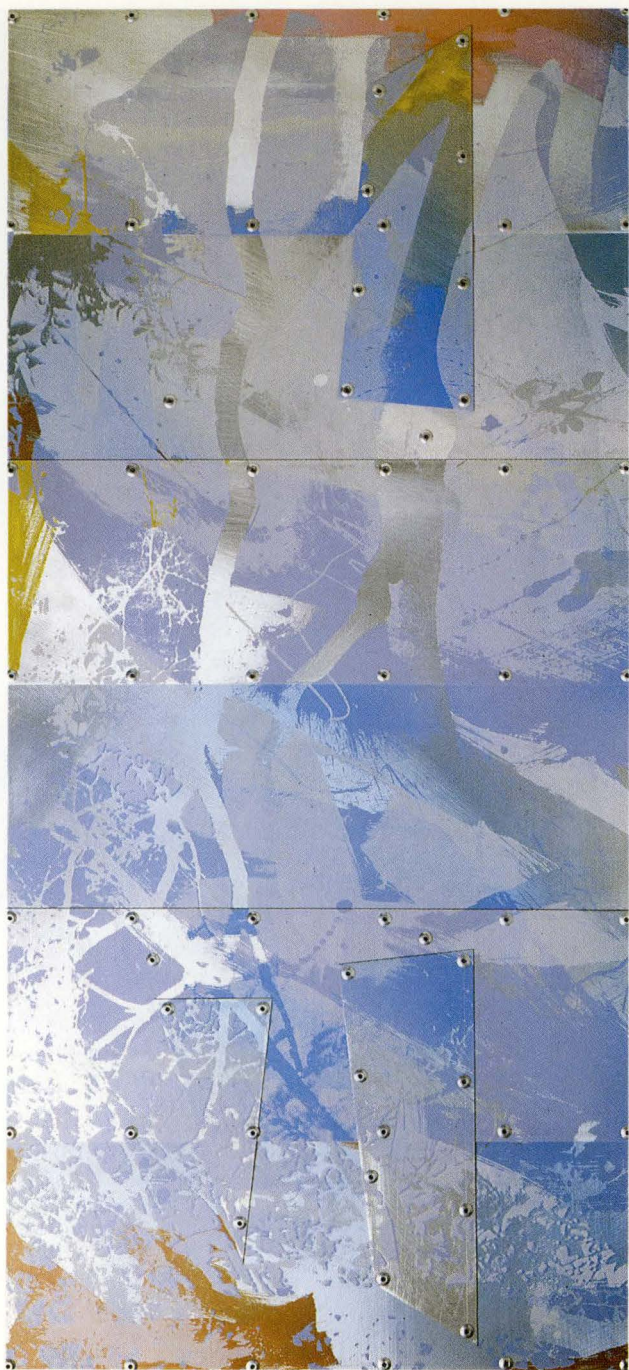




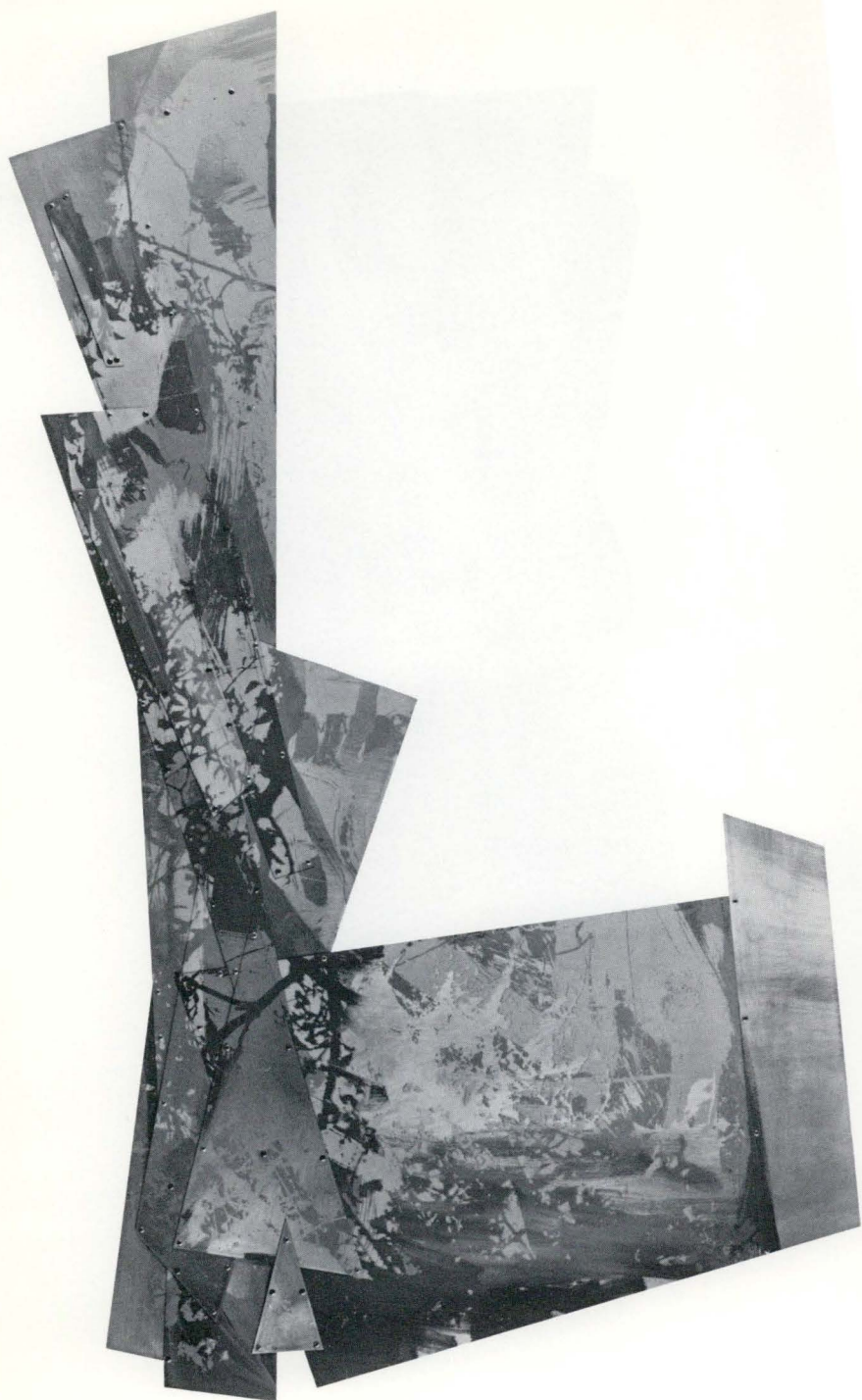
















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- 28 *Kyoto I*, 1981, silkscreen on paper, 66 x 50 cm.
- 29 *Kyoto II*, 1981, silkscreen on paper, 66 x 50 cm.
- 30 *Generation 2*, 1983, silkscreen on paper, 76.5 x 56.5 cm.
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- 36 *Kyoto #3*, 1982, silkscreen on paper, 80.5 x 121 cm.
- 37 *Elizabeth: Study V*, 1986, ink, oil pastel, enamel, and silkscreen on paper, 44 x 95.5 cm.
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- 41 *Niko Study #2*, 1986, silkscreen, enamel, aluminum dust, acrylic and collage on card, 49 x 101 cm.
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- 44 *Niko One*, 1986, enamel and silkscreen on riveted aluminum, 44.5 x 96 cm.

- 45 *Niko Two*, 1986, enamel and silkscreen on riveted aluminum, 44 x 96 cm. Collection of Dr. and Mrs. D. Enarson.
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All photographs by Raymond Lum.

Dorothy Speak / HARMONY

Aunt Miriam and my grandmother lived on Sweetland Avenue under the dark spreading branches of a red maple that shut out the sky and, in my memory, cast the yard and the house in a perpetual twilight, like the atmosphere in an old silent movie. I spent two weeks with them every summer, while my parents travelled abroad. A town the size of Harmony didn't offer much by way of entertainment. I passed many hours cross-legged on a granite boulder, dropped, I thought, by some significant accident of geology in the middle of the front lawn. When I went indoors, blinded by the gloom of the house, I would find my grandmother stretched out in the livingroom on the hard Victorian sofa, looking as stoic as a martyr on a rack.

"Oh, there you are, Carmel," she said on one such afternoon, lowering a copy of *The Complete Bible Quiz* into her lap. She pushed herself up slowly on her elbow. "Turn that darned thing off."

I went over and switched off the television. "Do you want anything?" I asked.

"No," she said grimly, "there's no help for me." Then she looked at me ironically. "Unless you could kill me. Pop me off somehow." She wanted to die before she turned eighty-seven. I hoped she would live forever.

"I don't know—" I said dubiously, then added, "Maybe we could hire someone to do it."

She drew back, momentarily fearful. "Are there such people? Do you think they'd actually do it? Oh, I shouldn't talk this way!"

Her voice had not always been so deep. She had a man's voice now, and her face had grown flat and masculine. Her skin was violet behind her thick glasses, and her ears were enormous, droopy and oily-looking. Not at all like the delicate ears of the girl in the photograph hanging above her head. I was said to resemble this

picture of my grandmother posed in a high-necked dress before a heavy, theatrical curtain. Her face was smooth as an egg. She had one long blonde braid, tied with a satin ribbon, and on her knee she held a live Dachshund.

"Where's my purse?" my grandmother glared around near-sightedly, and finally found it under a pillow. "Here," she said finally, rummaging in it with crooked fingers. "Here's a dollar for a treat at Glass's. You *could* make me a cup of tea." She gripped my hand hard, her grey eyes blazing. "Don't ever get old!" She reached for her cane, pushing herself up by her swollen knuckles. For seconds she hung, half-way to her feet. I knew better than to try to help her. She began to make her rickety way to the diningroom, a journey of five minutes.

"Look at these old legs," she growled. "They're good for nothing."

I headed for the kitchen, calling over my shoulder, "What kind of tea do you want?" This was a conversation we rehearsed every day.

"Darjeeling. It's the best, I think. Don't you? Except for green tea, and you can't find that anymore. Don't give me any of Miriam's herbal tea. I'd rather drink hot water."

In the kitchen Aunt Miriam was wedged between the ironing board and the stove, the hot iron shooting steam up in her face. "The kettle's on," she told me. It was a small kitchen for such a large house. Miriam had spoken once of extending it into the back yard.

"And knock down walls?" my grandmother said. "What for?"

Once, looking at the kitchen cupboards with their ugly steel handles, I asked Miriam, "Is this the original kitchen?" and she sighed. "*Everything* in this house is original."

At the time, the frustration in her voice was lost on me. I saw Aunt Miriam as a living part of the satisfying decline of the house. I did not think she could be anything but charmed, as I was, by the mustiness wafting up from the basement, the lengthening cracks in the ceilings, the dark wax on the floors. She could have painted the front porch, torn up the ugly ferns and planted begonias, modernized the windows, but my grandmother didn't want anything changed.

Watching Miriam bend over the hot iron, perspiration beading on the fine hairs above her lip, I believed there was no better place for my aunt. She was in her late forties, and there was a bizarreness to her looks. Her head was long and peanut-shaped, as though she'd had a violent birth. She had a full, unattractive lower lip and the large penetrating eyes of a psychic, the slightly drooping right lid giving her a look of clairvoyance.

When she was younger, she had taken a secretarial course. She had travelled on a ship all the way around the world and come back manless. Now she did the dusting and the ironing in my grandmother's house, went in the evenings to the Public Library for works of non-fiction, to the Princess Theatre, and to her Maycourt evenings, where she sat in a circle with old women and knitted clothes for the poor. She did the typing every fall for the United Appeal and was vice-chairperson of the Harmony Emergency League, for which position she was given an orange hard-hat that hung ready, on the kitchen wall.

In those days, I admired her because I sensed that she had fashioned a life out of nothing. Now, I think that she was one of those odd people who—like artists, writers—are emotionally unfit for a normal life, who must orbit in a universe entirely of their own creation—if this does not drive them mad.

Those summers I visited my grandmother, I lost track of how many times we ate in a day. We seemed always to be sitting down to a makeshift meal, and this suited me fine.

"Have some potato chips," my grandmother gestured to a glass bowl. "It's always nice to have chips on the table," she sighed. "Wouldn't you like a coke?" she asked me. "Miriam, get Carmel a nice coke." Miriam put down her teacup, got up and went into the kitchen. I bit into a limp potato chip. Everything in that house was stale. Daily, we picked away at plates and bowls of food that had the permanence of a dusty still life. Nothing ever seemed to diminish: cheese curds, butter collapsed in a puddle from the heat, sultana cookies, dull-skinned fruit spotted with flies, ritz crackers, butter tarts, jars of jam, peppermints—all lasted forever.

"Hank Infant called last night when you were at the League meeting," my grandmother said.

Aunt Miriam's eyes flickered for an instant. Then she went back to buttering a blueberry biscuit. "I wish he wouldn't call here," she said coldly. "I wish he wouldn't come around."

"Oh, he was only being nice." Sometimes my grandmother spoke to Miriam as though she were a difficult child who had to be stepped around carefully, coaxed and flattered. "Asking if we needed anything. He put those blueberry biscuits in with our order for free."

Aunt Miriam, about to bite into the biscuit, now set it aside. "They're stale," she said.

"Hank Infant has McKeen's Grocers," my grandmother told me, ignoring Miriam. I knew all about Hank Infant. I had seen him in the store, a florid, rotund man with heavy glasses and large moles on his arms, stamping prices on Rice Crispie boxes and spraying down the lettuce with a hose.

"He's the manager, not the owner," Miriam told me.

"Well, he may not have been one of my brightest students," my grandmother said. "But he was always pleasant and respectful. Used to erase the blackboard for me. He was sweet on Miriam even then. She was in grade nine when he was in twelve."

"He'd failed twice," said Miriam.

"They say his staff loves him because he pitches in and helps at the store. He's not a proud man."

"The dulllest job doesn't bore him," Miriam explained to me.

"There aren't many bachelors left from your generation," my grandmother reminded her, and Miriam rolled her eyes at me.

"There's usually a reason when people don't leave Harmony, Mother. Often there's something wrong with them."

"I suppose you're looking for a more exotic brand of man? A country and western singer, maybe?"

"Mother —" Miriam, bored, looked out the window.

"A trapeze artist?"

"Don't be ridiculous." Blushing, Miriam reached for a peppermint and stuck it inside her cheek.

"A member of Parliament?"

My grandmother was laughing now, and so was I, sucking on soft potato chips, tossing cheese curds into my mouth, swinging my legs beneath the table.

"Anything but a Harmony man."

"A travelling evangelist?"

"Good heavens, no! Not that!" Miriam threw up her hands. She was smiling now. My grandmother's line of questioning seemed to please her after all, as though all these various men were really available and eager to snap her up.

"I don't get it," I said to Miriam. "You should be married. You're so nice."

"She'd make a fine wife."

"Oh stop it you two," Miriam said, self-consciously arranging the curls around her face.

My grandmother thought for a minute. "*You* stayed in Harmony."

"That's different. I have responsibilities. I have you to take care of."

"Oh fiddle!" said my grandmother.

The summer I was twelve, Aunt Miriam fetched me in August as usual from the bus depot in the Packard that had been my grandfather's. She rarely used the car, and when she did she steered it tentatively around the streets of Harmony, gripping the wheel with alarm as though she drove an army tank. But on the way to Sweetland Avenue that day, she sailed straight through a stop sign, then slammed on the brakes, the jolt throwing my suitcase to the floor of the back seat.

"Oh dear, what am I thinking of?" she said, and her chin, furry with a fine blonde down, trembled.

My grandmother was sitting on a hard chair in the livingroom, quite transformed. She was wearing a navy voile dress with big white polka dots on it, and her feet had been wedged into a pair of black suede shoes whose toes were curled up like old dry snakes. Her hair, recently permanented, had the texture of raw wool.

"Well, Carmel," she said. "You've come to observe the circus."

"Come here," Aunt Miriam spoke quickly from the hallway, with a stony look at my grandmother. "There's someone you must meet." I followed her through the kitchen, where pots were bubbling on the stove, outside. There, on a low canvas chair, under the horny old lilac bush, was a man with a short red beard and wire-rimmed glasses reading a magazine. I stood on the little porch, with its swaying railings, and stared at him.

"Willard, Carmel has arrived," called Miriam stiffly.

He looked up at me, assessing me slowly from head to foot. "So I see," he said, turning back to his magazine. Miriam smiled apologetically at the spirea bush beside the porch. We went back indoors.

"Who's he?" I asked. Then she told me about going to the bus depot early in the summer to pick up a package.

"And this man, a stranger, came up to me and bowed slightly and said, 'I hope you'll forgive me for saying this, but I really can't help myself. I had to tell you' — and he picked up my hand and kissed the back of it so gently — 'I had to tell you that you are simply beautiful.'" She turned to me, defensive. "No one had ever said that to me, in my entire life, not even my own mother."

I had to lean on the counter, so preposterous did I find this story: the idea that someone should call Miriam beautiful. Miriam with the dull colouring of a mallard. Miriam with her furry mottled complexion and monkey's ears. I recognized for the first time her impossible homeliness.

"Well then," she said, "of course, I collected my package, and he was still hanging around, looking out the window at our old Harmony, and well, I had to. I asked, if he had time between buses, would he care for a cup of iced tea. He picked up his gear — a duffle bag and a packsack and a sleeping bag and a pair of skis — and he packed them all rather permanently, I thought, into the trunk of the car. He stayed on for one dinner and then another. Two days later, he proposed to me."

While Miriam was fixing lunch, my grandmother made me close the amber leaded doors between the livingroom and the vestibule and sit down beside her.

"I haven't had anyone to talk to for six weeks, and I feel like I'm going to burst," she told me, and slid her feet out of her shoes, wincing. "When Miriam brought that stranger home — my son-in-law! Oh, the very thought makes me want to weep! When she brought him home, she told me he was a friend of a friend. Imagine the deception! He came for tea, and then kept staying on for the next meal. Miriam kept the house full of good smells. And then a couple of days later they went out very early, while I was still in the shower. Sneaky pair! What was I to do? What could I prevent? How could I have followed them, with these wooden legs? They came back in the middle of the morning, Miriam in her best summer suit — the saffron one with the matching turban she bought to meet Hank Infant's mother. She came into the kitchen where I was struggling with the toaster. Her face was spread with a perfectly ridiculous smile, the coward skulking behind her. I knew instantly they'd been to City Hall. I said, 'Miriam, I fear for you. You've gone soft in the head.'"

"At first I never saw them. It seemed they were always disappearing into the bedroom. A wonder they didn't take their meals in there too! Or Willard was in the bathroom, splashing water around, creating a flood. My John was never vain like that. Oh, don't try to speak to him. It's impossible to talk to the man! I tried him out on the Bible Quiz, and he didn't even know the difference between the Old and the New Testament. He calls himself an itinerant ski instructor. More like a highway robber! I'm saying terrible things, I know." She wrung her veiny hands. "Oh, I've been lonely these weeks! I'm not sure I can see anything clearly anymore. I'm not sure that I'm not dead and this isn't just a hellish dream. Do you think I'm being too critical?"

"No," I said. "He's a liar. He told Miriam she was beautiful."

"Beautiful? And Miriam fell for that? The girl must have been dazed by too much sun. I don't want to be unfair to her, but it seems to me that whatever brains I had to pass on must have all gone to your mother."

Willard appeared at the glass doors and opened one of them swiftly. "Lunch is ready," he said, smirking, and my grandmother blanched. He went away.

"Get that spoon beside the sofa and help me on with these shoes." She made her way, at twice her old speed, to the diningroom, where Miriam was carrying in hot dishes and Willard was drumming his fingers on the back of his chair. He was a good foot shorter than Miriam, and perhaps ten years younger. I saw that he had soft, crooked teeth.

"Let me help you," he said impatiently, stepping toward my grandmother, but she swung her cane at him.

"What makes you think I need help?"

"You're hanging onto the doorknobs."

"Well, that's what doorknobs are for, aren't they? As long as I can do this by myself," she sank into her chair, "I can be independent."

She looked around critically at the fare Miriam had set out: roast leg of lamb glistening on a platter, beets, a steaming bowl of creamed potatoes, cucumber salad. "These regular meals are plugging me up," she said.

Miriam sat down opposite Willard and took up her napkin. "Willard gets hungry, Mother."

We began to eat, the clatter of cutlery like gunfire in the silent room. Finally, Willard, slicing a beet thinly, addressed my grandmother. "Speaking of independence," he said, "have you thought of retiring to a nursing home? So that Miriam could get on with her life?"

"Oh fiddle!" my grandmother dropped her fork and began to row her cane agitatedly against her thigh. "Some *men* are more trouble than a crippled old woman. I won't go and live with all those old people," she said bitterly. "Miriam's life is here. She's always been free to do as she pleases. I've never constrained her."

"Is that so?" said Willard with latent sarcasm. He picked up a glass of pale wine and examined it, turning his wrist and smiling to himself. He seemed always to be feeding on a private amusement.

"You needn't think you'll get rid of me so easily," said my grandmother. "I've got plenty of life left in me."

"Hmm," Willard murmured skeptically.

Time did not stand still, as it had other summers, what with regimented mealtimes and Miriam flitting around tending to Willard's wants. She went grocery shopping and cooked and washed Willard's sweaty clothes. In the mornings, long after the three of us were up, we would see her carrying Willard's breakfast up to him on a tray, and my grandmother would roar from the livingroom, "Doesn't he have two healthy legs of his own?"

She and I read all day or watched television or played cribbage. One afternoon, dealing out the cards, she said, "I don't think he's a ski instructor at all." The days were hot and the storm windows were still on. She had unbuttoned the front of her dress for relief, revealing a grey slip and her flat speckled chest.

"Maybe he's an imposter. He's wanted by the law," I said.

"No doubt," she said, moving her cribbage peg. "Fifteen two, fifteen four, fifteen six. We'll have the police on our door soon." She pulled a face. "Well," she said, discouraged, "I suppose that's just wishful thinking."

I was enjoying the conspiracy that had blossomed between my grandmother and me. I tiptoed around the house in the hope of bringing back intelligence to her. I watched Willard kissing Miriam's ear in the backyard, and Miriam laughing and sliding her hand under his beard. "Isn't Miriam afraid of being bitten by fleas?" I asked my grandmother. When Willard was in the bathroom, I pressed my ear to the door, listening for obscene male noises. No matter how eternally he washed himself, he always emerged looking unclean.

"Maybe he drinks in the bathroom," I suggested to my grandmother, and she barked and stamped her cane on the floor.

A week after I arrived, Willard began to spend a good deal of time on the phone.

"Talking to his Mafia friends," my grandmother speculated. Once I crept upstairs and pressed myself against the wall outside the door to Miriam and Willard's room. I heard him pause on the phone and say, "Just a moment." In an instant he was out in the hall and on top of me with his hands around my throat. "What do you think you're doing?" he gnashed his furry teeth at me. "You little spy! You watch your step, or you'll be out on your ear. There's a bus leaving Harmony every hour." He let me go, pushing me toward the stairs.

I went to Miriam, who was hanging Willard's laundry out on the line.

"How can you stand Willard?" I demanded. "He's so — he's *weird!*"

She lowered her arms and removed the clothes pegs from her mouth. "Try to like him," she begged. "He's not so bad. Sometimes it's the odd people who make life interesting. And — he appreciates me."

My grandmother appeared at the door in time to see Miriam shoot Willard's stained underwear out into the sunshine.

"Can't you dry the underwear in the cellar? You might just as well broadcast our business to the neighbourhood! It's indecent!"

Miriam sighed. "Mother, we are legally married. I can show you the certificate."

"Don't do that. I might tear it up!" She went back to the livingroom, stamping her cane all the way.

Miriam posted a notice on the bulletin board in McKeen's to advertise typing services in order to help pay the extra food bills. We could hear the thunder of the typewriter from downstairs. One afternoon when my grandmother was sleeping, I went upstairs and watched Miriam, her long, rigid fingers hammering furiously at the keys. She flung the return arm across with such vigour that I was afraid it would sail through the wall. Finally she stopped, flexed her fingers and rolled her head, her hand flat on her long neck.

"I have a funny story for you," she said, and we looked at each other for a moment, both wishing, I suppose, for our old companionship. I realized how much I missed our weekly walk to the library, and Thursday nights at the Princess Theatre.

"I saw Hank Infant in the grocery store. He came up behind me when I was tacking up my notice on the board and he said, 'Miriam, oh Miriam,' wagging his head like a puppet. 'How could you do this to me, Miriam?'"

I gave her a cold look. "Poor Hank," I said, turning on my heel. "I know how he feels."

After that, a stretch of rainy days seemed to charge Willard with nervous energy. He carried his skis from the basement up to his bedroom, where he scraped the old wax off them, leaving the shavings for Miriam to sweep up. He performed sit-ups and Jumping Jacks up there. Downstairs, my grandmother and I watched the diningroom chandelier sway dangerously.

"This is not a gymnasium!" she snapped. "He'll bring the ceiling down!" Above the shaking of the house, Miriam's typewriter clattered on.

Close to the end of my visit, my grandmother and I were watching *Leave It To Beaver* on television about four o'clock on an afternoon when water teemed down the windowpanes. The house was quiet for a change. The only thunder we heard was the real thing, rolling out of the sky. Halfway through the programme, Miriam came into the livingroom, her shoes seeping water onto the floorboards. We had not heard her come in from delivering a typing job. I saw that her face was mauve with excitement.

"I've been searching for Willard," she told us rather breathlessly. "I can't find him anywhere. Where's he gone?" We looked at her unsympathetically. My grandmother turned back to the television.

"I don't keep track of Willard's whereabouts," she said. "But I'd enjoy a cup of tea."

"I went upstairs and noticed the closet open," Miriam went on. "I saw that his clothes were gone. The drawers are empty. All his things are gone, even his skis from the basement. Everything." She looked at us hopefully, as though she thought we might be conducting some kind of practical joke. I got up and stood at the piano, picking softly at the keys.

"Did you see anything, Carmel?" Miriam asked.

"No," I said without looking around. "I didn't see him at all. I was in the attic."

I felt her eyes on me, and finally I turned to face her. I saw what I might have known all along: that she wished she'd been given my beauty.

"He's cleared out, then," my grandmother declared, clasping her hands. "Praise the Lord! We're well rid of him. I didn't like him. I didn't trust him. I was convinced from the start that he was false-hearted."

"It can't be," Miriam frowned and looked at the streaming window. "Oh such a day?"

"He was after our money."

"What money, Mother?" said Miriam with rising impatience.

"Well, this house, of course, is worth something."

"This house is falling down!" said Miriam, and her voice faltered.

"It provided Willard with a roof over his head for two months, didn't it? That's what you were to him. Food and shelter. No more, no less." She sighed with relief. "I feel like a sherry, suddenly. Miriam, would you mind?"

Miriam went out, past the umbrella she'd left open on the hall floor to drip dry. We heard her open the walnut cupboard in the diningroom. She returned with a glass of bronze liquid, handed it to my grandmother and went softly up the stairs, still in her wet shoes. My grandmother sipped greedily on her sherry and licked her lips like a cat. She frowned.

"I feel happy, but I don't know why."

"Willard's gone," I told her. I was looking through the sheet music in the piano seat.

"Willard who?" she said, then added, angry with herself. "I forget names. I'll forget yours in a minute."

The day before Willard disappeared, I had gone up to the attic while my grandmother read the Bible and Miriam was out grocery shopping. It was a hot, sticky afternoon. I opened the wardrobes containing my grandmother's old clothes and had just stepped into a green velvet dress when I heard someone on the second-floor landing. To reach the attic, it was necessary to open a trap door and pull the Jacob's ladder down from the ceiling. I heard the squeak of the hinges and had just enough time to draw the dress up before Willard sprang from the top step of the ladder into the attic.

"I didn't know this place existed," he said enthusiastically, surveying stacks of hat boxes, an antique wheel chair, cartons of books, oil paintings, a dressmaker's mannequin. Then he noticed me standing awkwardly, clutching the dress closed behind me, and he said, "Here, let me help you," and stepped up confidently behind me. He began to fasten the little impossible buttons, taking his time, and I hoped that he had noticed—he *must* have seen—that I was old enough to wear a bra. A light perspiration broke out on my neck. "There," he said, finally. We were standing in front of the mirror, and I saw that his face too was glistening from the closeness of the attic. The light behind us was silver where the sun filtered through the dust in the air, and the smell of the roof timbers was strong. Then he reached up and touched my right ear, gently.

"Your ears are beautiful. They're like seashells," he said. He surveyed my blonde hair, which was piled up on my head, wisps of it falling down around my face. "You're a good-looking girl. You've got your grandmother's looks. Poor old Miriam was passed by."

It was only then that I saw how Miriam might have been swept away by Willard at first, by his audaciousness and his poetry, and by the physical strength I felt in his hands when he buttoned me up. He moved away and began to poke through boxes of books and old clothing. He pulled a pair of rusty men's skates from a box. "I should take these with me when I go," he said. "Recondition them just for fun." His uncharacteristic cheerfulness made me suspicious.

"You can't have those. They belong to my grandfather."

"*Belonged*," he corrected me, and slid his thumb down one of the blades. "Steel wool and oil would get this rust off."

"Take them where?" I asked.

"Oh," he said lightly, "I'm going away. I'm leaving."

"But you can't. You're married!" I said, not that I wanted him to stay.

He shrugged. "Who's to stop me? Miriam? She wouldn't know how to keep a fly in a bottle. I have my work. You may have noticed there's no skiing within a hundred miles of here. I couldn't take this place much longer, anyway. This house and this disastrous town. As I said, there's a bus leaving here every hour." He looked at me sharply. "Don't tell Miriam. She might try to tag along."

"No, I won't," I said quickly. I thought he wasn't very smart. Of course I would tell her. "Where do you think you'll go?"

He grinned at me. "Oh, ho, you're a tricky one, aren't you? Too smart for your own good. Let's just say not too far but far enough." He hung the skates over his shoulder and moved to the trap door. "Remember," he winked at me. "We have a secret," and he hopped jauntily onto the ladder.

That winter, I was whitening my skates on a section of *The Globe and Mail* on my parents' kitchen floor, when a picture of Willard leapt up at me from the sports page. The caption said he had won first prize in the American Olympics in Colorado. He was a bona fide skier after all. He was pictured grinning, with a pair of sun goggles hanging around his neck, wearing a vest with the number 11 on it. I saw that one of his teeth had been knocked out. Had Miriam seen this? I wondered. I pictured my grandmother coming across this same picture in her paper; I saw her tearing the picture out and shuffling to the fireplace with it. It would have been easy for me to cut out the photo and send it to Miriam, but I didn't do this.

I went on polishing my skates, drawing the sponge applicator slowly over the toe and around the lace-holes. Into my mind came a satisfying picture of Miriam attending the Maycourt evenings in her saffron suit. Miriam at Harmony Emergency League meetings, her face steadfast and fatalistic beneath her orange hard-hat. Miriam in the semi-dark at the Princess Theatre, a box of popcorn balanced on her knee, the silver light from the projector room striking her erect shoulders.

Yes, I thought comfortably, everything had turned out for the better.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT THOMAS was born in 1951 at Berkeley, California. He was educated at San Francisco State University and the University of California at Santa Cruz, and works as a word processor at a law firm in San Francisco. Some of his poetry has appeared in *American Poetry Review* and some is forthcoming in *California Quarterly* and *The Yale Review*.

K. D. MILLER was educated at the University of Guelph and at UBC. Her short fiction has appeared in *Flare* and in *TCR* (#23 and #42). She currently lives in Toronto.

JAMES L. SWANSON lives and writes in McBride, B.C.

PATRICK ROSCOE lives on the Costa del Sol, Spain. The story published here is from a collection in progress, *Birthmarks*. A first collection, *Beneath the Western Slopes*, appeared in 1987; a novel, *God's Peculiar Care*, will appear in fall of 1988.

WAYNE EASTCOTT is a printmaker who has been exhibiting internationally since the early 1970s. He is most noted for his innovative use of technology and materials. Since 1979, he has been working closely with the printmaking community in Japan. Wayne teaches at Capilano College in the Studio Art programme.

TED LINDBERG, formerly Director of the Burnaby Art Gallery, was the curator of Wayne Eastcott's show, *The Printed Painting*.

DOROTHY SPEAK grew up in southern Ontario and now lives in Ottawa. Her stories have appeared in *Queen's Quarterly*, *Fiddlehead*, *Prism*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Room of One's Own*, *The University of Windsor Review*, and other journals.



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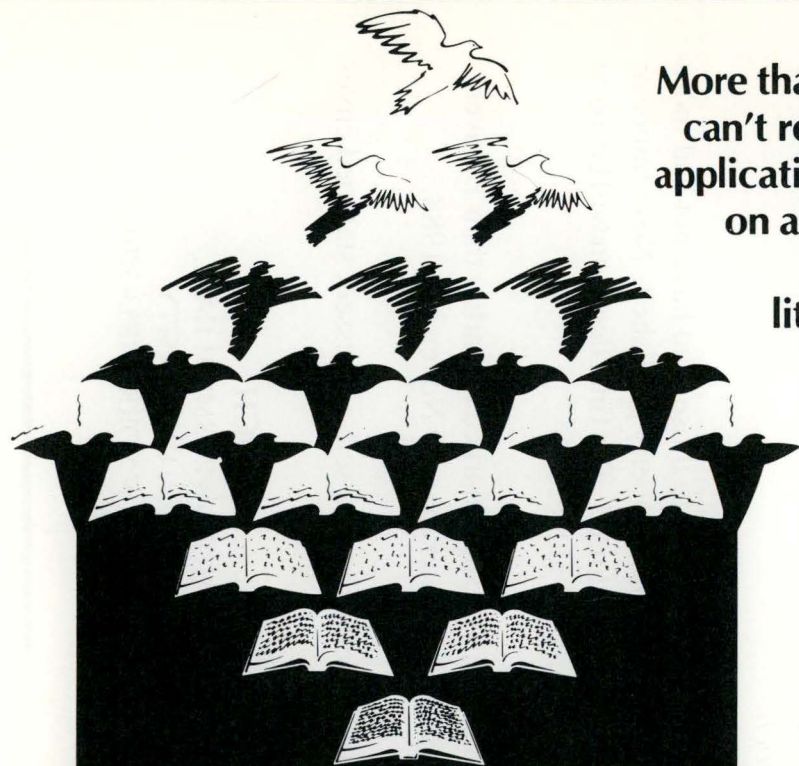
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