

THE GRIFFIN

The Griffin

*"This creature was sacred to the sun
and kept guard over hidden treasures."*



ABDUL-HAMID AL SHATTI

THIS CAN WAIT

It cannot
It will not
It does not wait
This concern
Like child reckless
Tugs and yanks
And screams
For immediate attention
Which, not finding,
Is sought elsewhere
By child reckless
Wandering away
To return cranky later

PARTAKING IN SADNESS

Share a melancholy sadness
So that I can partake
And take a part
Away from your burden.
If I partake
And possess a part ache
Then your ache can't be whole;
This is my goal.
To share in sorrow
Reducing it by my share.

MY MIND'S SIDE OF THE STORY

It came uninvited
To my livingroom
Unwelcome unwanted guest
(Or rather pest)
To rearrange my furniture
And previously permanent fixtures.
It ate all its meals
Free
Of my sustenance
And thrived
While it survived
On my unwilling generosity
Growing
Taking up
More living space
Than I could spare.
I banished it
The tumorous intruder
And it left
With the help
Of an adept surgeon
Taking with it
Trinkets for souvenirs
Leaving my livingroom
In naked disarray
To be refurnished later.

A PRESENCE

When I at seven, naked on a toilet lid,
sat and watched my mother, bathe,
tiny nursery seeds dormant in my chest
I pressed and curled my knees up to my chin.

“Mama, have you ever had
a baby that was dead?” A presence
streamed across her face
like clouded, soap-stung water,
while in her hands lay waste the bar.
Slowly, as with slipping gears,
she spun colored bubble mirrors
and wiped them down her throat and breasts.

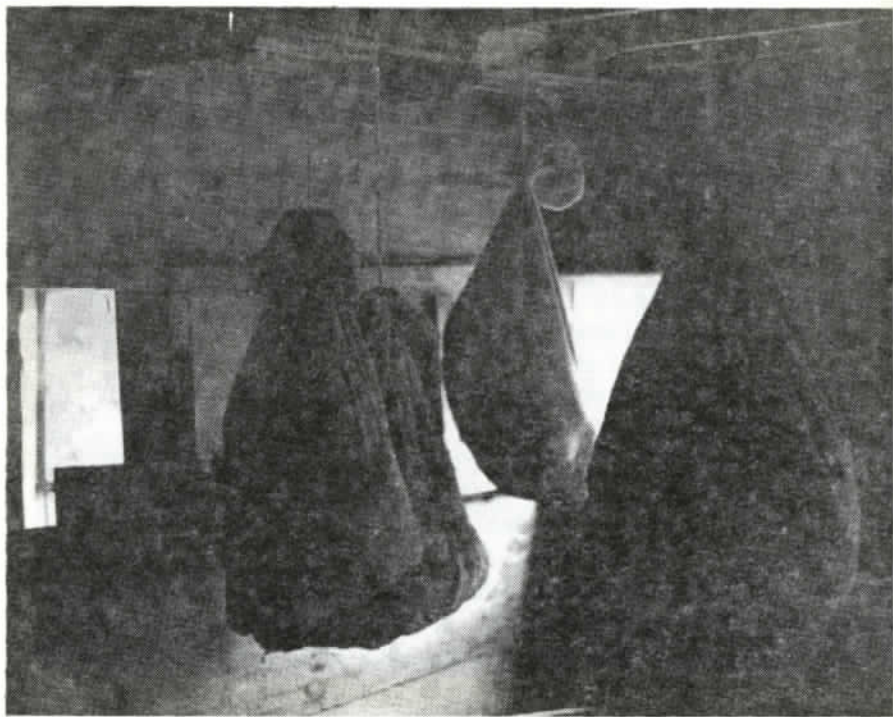
PAUL ENGELHARDT



HUSTLER

With back pockets dripping colored lust
You stroll.
Cruising the camp in tattered T shirt
His bronze muscles glowing in red
Posing
As black eyes shred your costume
And ravish your body
Beads of anticipation
Roll off your forehead
As you near the room
With cash in hand and few words
Flashing zippers
Climaxing to vaseline nights
Slipping into silent mornings.

ANN CANALE



MELLIE'S STORY

When the moon
rises
above the hill
and the leaves
dance
to a windless tune,
a haunt
walks
past in shrouded gloom,
unfettered
by a confined grave
wed
to a doomed eternity,
haunting
yet haunted be.

My name is Rachel Tratter; we, all of us Tratters, lived here in these Ozark mountains for as long as most folks hereabouts could recollect. My Paw scraped the dirt 'n grew a few crops, and slopped a dozen hogs. Farmin' for us weren't just a way of livin', it were the only way of eatin'. Nobody we knowed was better off'n us, so it seemed right. My Mam sewed for a few town women and minded us kids. 'Sides me I had four brothers Jake, Frank, Seth and Rafe. I were the oldest. I warn't good for a lot, bein' a girl, but I could help Mam with the womanly chores. It were a hard life, I guess; we never thought about it much. I don't know if we ever knew it. Livin' like we did was all we did know. My Paw were a hard man, takin' no charity an' givin' none in return.

When Rafe was eight, Mam got herself in the family way. That next October Mellie was born, birthed right here in the back room, just like the rest of us. Twelve I were then, "Old enuf for helpin' with the birthin' ", my Paw said. I were the first to hold her. So soft she was and tiny and new. She got fat suckin' at Mam's breast. She never cried, not ever. First off, Paw liked that - no squallin' kid to keep him awake of a night or to scare them hogs. Later, he just wondered. Never a sound did she make.

'Bout the time she were two, Mam thought she shoulda bin walkin'. Mellie seemed happy layin' in the sun. Leastways, we thought she was happy. She didn't cry nor laugh. Mellie were just there.

Later, 'round about the time Mellie were seven, the folks hereabouts, and in town, got us a school marm, name of Miss Abbott. The sheriff come a callin' on us, a-tellin' Paw how us kids oughta be in school; it be the law. Paw agreed that Mellie and Seth and Rafe could go. Me 'n Frank wuz needed here to home, else ain't none of us were gonna eat.

Miss Abbott give the boys a test. Then she put Seth in the third grade; he were eleven then and put Rafe in the second; he were nine. Mellie never took that test. Frank said she jest sat 'n looked at the pencil all day and came home with the boys after school.

Mellie wuz a beautiful chile. Fair, fair of face, that is. Her hair were black, as a crow's feather. Jest as soft 'n shiny, too. She be a tiny thing still, with hands and feet right dainty. Her teeth didn't stick out in front like Frank's neither. It be her eyes. Her eyes were brown as mud puddles and round as saucers. But they were dead eyes. Dead, not dumb or sad, but dead. There were no lines from squintin' or laughin'. Her eyes were as dead as her mind. If you looked in them, you got all cold and shivery, e'en if it were hot as blazes outside.

Miss Abbott tole Paw that Mellie wuz slow, real slow, but she'd show her. Sometimes, with slow folk, all you had to do wuz show 'em something and sometimes, then they could do it too. Sometimes.

At school, Miss Abbott stood Mellie in front of the chalk board. She showed her the letters of her name. Then she gave her a piece of chalk and took her hand. She made a big M on the board. "Do like I do, Mellie," she said. "Make a big M." Seth said Mellie put lines on the board alright, but she din't never make that big M. That night the boys brought her back home, again.

Each day, the boys took her to school. Each day she would go back to the chalk board and screech lines across it. Miss Abbott kept a-tryin' to show Mellie that big M, but Seth said there weren't no help for it. All Mellie did was screech and squeak that chalk. That's what Rafe tole us.

After almost three weeks of school, Miss Abbott came to see Paw. She tole him she couldn't help Mellie no more. That screechin' wuz drivin' her and the class clean up the wall. She had had all the noise she could stand.

Paw said it were all right with him. Mellie 'n the boys could stay home. We needed all the hands a workin' we could get. So they never went back to school. Weren't nobody to argue with Paw onct his mind were set 'n the sheriff got enuf to do without botherin' poor honest folk.

Mellie's learnin' fell to me, what learnin' there wuz gonna be. Paw said one thing certain about Miss Abbott, she were almost right. Mebbe, if'n you showed Mellie, she could do it. Well, I showed Mellie how to make a daisy chain. It weren't no real help for nothin', but it kept her from underfoot. She'd set in the summer meadow, and tie them daisies together, 'til she had a chain that'd reach clear to China, I bet. Made a purty picture too. Her a-sittin' there in that green meadow, with that crow black hair of hers, blowin' in the breeze. Her face as purty as a calendar picture virgin's. Then she'd look up at you with those dead brown eyes of hers, and the picture would be gone. Mellie spent most of her time that summer in the meadow.

When she was along about ten, Mam showed her how to churn. Mam put her hands on the paddle and showed her how to move it. She tole her it would make butter out of the cow's milk. Mellie moved the paddle and churned. Paw was down-

right pleased. Now Mellie wuz worth her keep. All of us kids had to learn to be useful, that meant Mellie, too. What we never tole him, was that, if we didn't watch her, she'd a-turned that butter to cheese. Sometimes, I think I knew how Miss Abbott felt. . . .

We wuz all growing, so wuz Mellie. Leastways, her body wuz. She wuz thirteen and gettin' female soft, you know what I mean, female soft in the chest. If anything, she wuz lovelier than ever. Her smooth face, framed by all that black, black hair, and her figure all girlish like. The boys, who came to see my brothers might have got some bad ideas, but them eyes of hers stopped them. Her eyes never grew up, neither did anything else in her head, I reckon.

Once, in her fifteenth summer, she was a-sittin' down there in the meadow, makin' them daisy chains, when a picture takin' man stopped and asked if he could take her picture; it were such a purty sight. He was all over clickin' away with his camera. Mellie jest kept makin' her chain. Then, she looked up at him, straight at his eyes with hers. He put away his camera and left. Came back the next day, he did, with a little ole cat. Said he brought it for Mellie. Paw said she could keep it okay, weren't no hurt in it stayin'. So, I showed her how to give it a little milk afore she started to churn, and how to pet it real soft-like.

Come that Spring, Mam were a fixin' to have another baby. Quite a surprise it wuz, too. Change of life chile, they called it. To top it all off, that ole cat done found herself a tom, and

she wuz fixin' to litter in the spring, too. Paw weren't none too happy. Well, the cat littered first. Six of the cutest kittens. Mellie wuz there and she petted each one soft and gentle-like. Next morning, Paw took them all, and the mother cat too, put them in an old flour sack, tied a rock 'round it and dropped it in the creek. Mellie saw that too. She stood there and watched 'til the bag was clear to the bottom, then she went and set in her meadow.

The first week of May, Mam had another boy. Named him Gabe. I put him in his cradle. I wuz so tired I got me to bed and dropped off as fast as a hot rock in snow.

Next morning, I went to fetch Gabe to Mam 'n his cradle wuz empty. Out the window I could see Mellie. She were a-sittin in the meadow, makin' a chain without daisies an' pettin' a cat that weren't there neither. Scared as I was, I ran to the creek. There wuz an old flour sack a-layin' at the bottom. I jumped right in 'n pulled it out. Little Gabe was in it. Dead, drowned, as dead as those kittens. I reckon that wuz one thing Paw should have never showed Mellie.

They came and took Mellie away. Took her to some institution they called it. Locked her up so's she couldn't hurt nobody else. My Mam, as soon as she wuz up, sat down at that churn, took the paddle in her hands and churned. 'Cept for all that gray in her hair, she looked a lot like Mellie. She never cried once for Mellie or Gabe. No way I ever saw. She just

churned, like Mellie. Her nor Paw ever talked about it again.

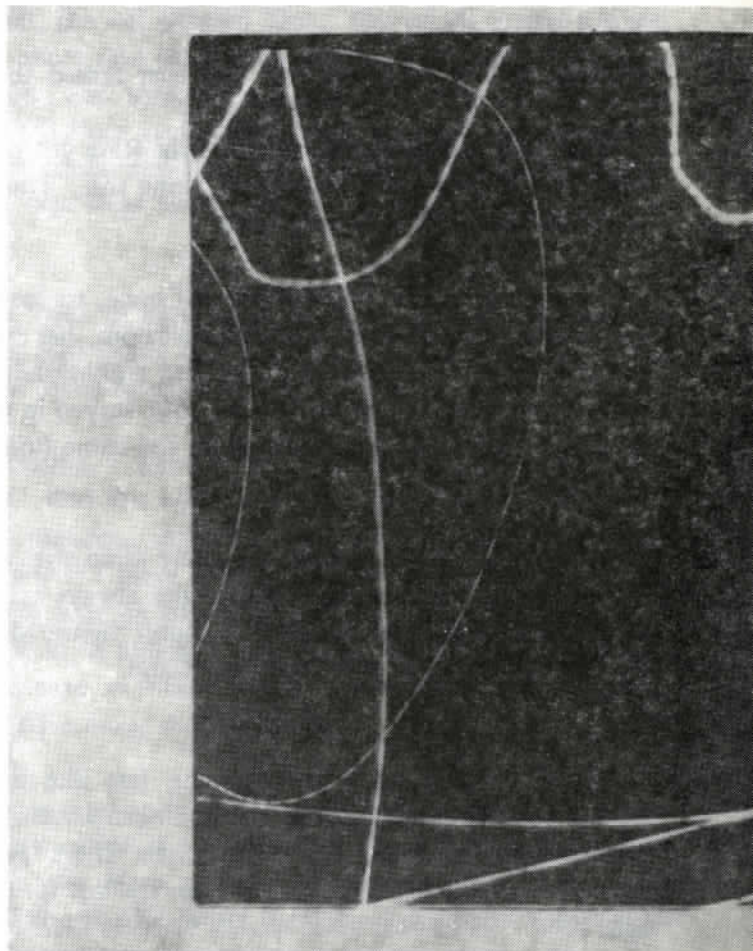
Paw died the next year, right after Rafe got hisself killed. Mam lived a little time, then went along too. They're up yonder on the hill with Gabe and Rafe.

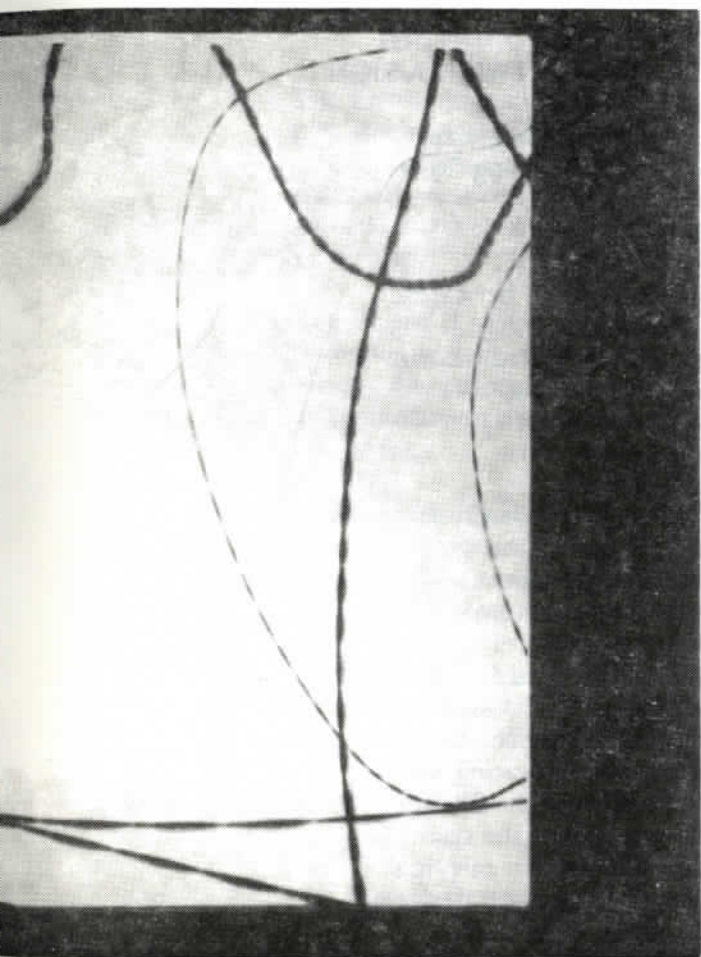
I went up to that institution, jest once, to see Mellie. She wuz a-sittin' there in that locked-up room, her hands movin' like she wuz still a-pettin' that cat and makin' daisy chains. It made me so sad, I never went back. She stayed in that little ole room for almost twenty years afore she came home, in a pine wood box.

It were October, almost the same time she wuz born. I buried her in the meadow where she always sat. I thought that would make her happy. I didn't figure Mam and Paw would want her with them and little Gabe.

That's Mellie's story, young man, jest like my Gran said Rachel tole her. Mellie's the girl you been a-seein' in that meadow long about dusk. She's bin a-sittin' there 'bout sundown since she came back to these hills, for the last time, a long time ago.

PAUL ENGELHARDT





A WOMAN WITH A SIGN

The robed balding man
with sweet smelling flower
free for a price
does not erase
the stench of
the woman and her cards.
The vision of
the sign-encrusted woman
was not invisible
after the cripple
sold trinkets on
a pogo stick.
The cackle of the Chinawoman
did not drown the
nightmare screams
caused by the woman with
the cards.
The middle-aged Girl Scout
with angel dust cookies
did not remove the taste
of the poster-bearing woman.
The hug from the Christian drunkard
did not forgive the slap
from the woman carrying
the greasy placards declaring
the healer of the sick
and the lover of children
to be an eater of bloody anuses.

THE HUNGRY POET

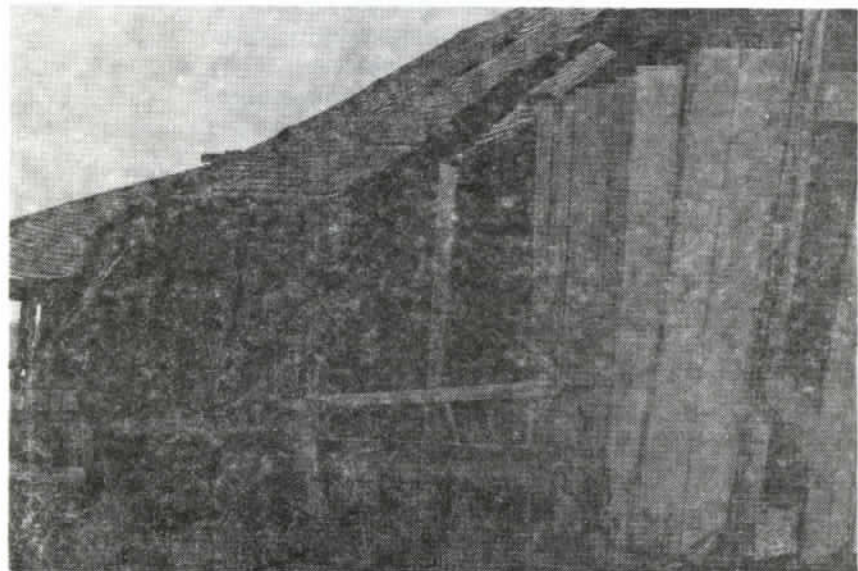
The first he regards with honor,
not wishing to spoil the virginity
of the non-rhyming verse.
Although, it seems more a
Rorschach test than an unhampered
pure form.

The second it seems works well
at birth, but fades as old
photos, the colors and purpose
go to confusion of mixed
sentiment.

As the elusive master time performs
the third appears.
Is three the bastards son of two?

Art's death comes soon,
for the presses ride
at a quarter to five
and the rent is long past due.

ANN CANALE



RAW UMBER

No one is here--
and if you came there would be
no reason to enter.

 You know how it is in damp
 cellars where food
 stays cool and the air
grows musty.

 People don't use places
 like this anymore--so why
do you care to come? You have nothing
 to cool
 and you see how it is--
lonely and dark.

A kind of dream sets in when
 the light is gone
 and no one's there
 to listen to the whistling
 and singing--
 or the breathing,
for that matter.

So what could you do
 but weave webs in the vacant air--
 or thread time,
 seeking day and a soft spirit
 somewhere,
while the old house shifts
 and creaks
 to keep itself from going to sleep--
some final sleep.

GREG GOBBERDIEL



THE SENATOR

His house was a prototype of the palace
 He came at age nineteen with his brother
 Though one of wood, the other of stone
 In their two-horse Pennsylvania wagon
 The building of both an elemental act
 Pitching a tent in Scotch Grove Township
 The hewing and the shaping an essential
 To camp and wait through the winter
 Act that rose in him, to create and form
 In spring fencing forty acres around
 A touchstone solidly sunk in his being
 A small frame house of local materials
 So that later he had need to build again
 Later after education and reading law
 To vicariously live through it again
 Admitted to practice at Anamosa, Iowa
 So when need came for more prison space
 Elected state representative and senator
 Suggested a financially free institution
 To be known for 'honesty above bribery'
 Because he knew that work with the hands
 As an 'able and influential legislator'
 Helped build the man, both body and soul
 He made the prison his special project
 And created the only freedom that matters
 In speeches and petition presentations
 Wrapped in lawyers garb and legislation
 Collected caringly from fellow citizens
 And bestowed as a gift from a man to men.

THE WAGON GATE

I would like to believe the horses
sensed the difference, their nostrils
quivering, their harnesses jingling
with white flecks of foam forming
and sweat staining their flanks dark.

Sometimes free drivers made delivery
the first time a tenuous touching
with the truth coming out at night
heads on pillows, wives safe beside,
that most seemed like alright guys.

But mostly it was trustees who drove
flowing out to fetch in a freedom
that pulled them between two worlds
like a rubber band stretched out and
then snapped back in place again.

And now no more wagons pass through
although the name remains the same
for it is memory that lives the most
and a gate not only shuts up space
but contains forever details of mind.

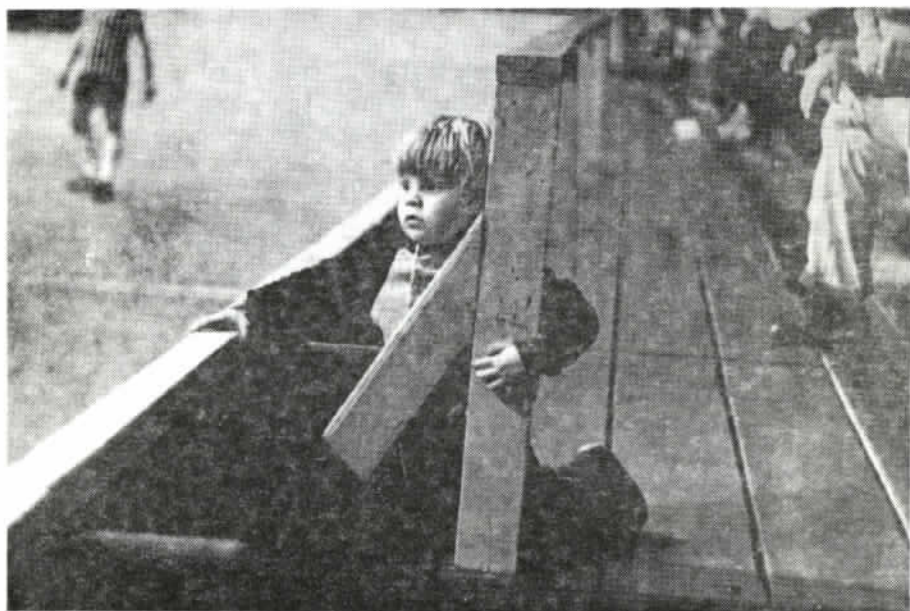
THE WHITE PALACE

The child tells of Saturday night rides
into town on the back seat of a black Ford
wondering about the men behind the walls
granting them the images of her experience.

Soldier uncles and World War II movies
guns on black boats surrounded by water
and the stone walls isolating the prison
the men adrift in a special social sea
and she, feeling marooned, stowing away
into the secret center of their attention
that bit of femininity, that perfect pet,
and they always that deep dark mystery
like the night when men of war and prison
joined her fantasy in unviolated freedom.

The adult tells of entering the courtyard
slowly, still trying to savor experience
to touch the strong mystery of the stones
roaming softly their great secret textures.

DAVID LEWIS



FREAK SHOW

I shall present them one by one.
 The dwarf who eats fire.
 A hunchback with squeezebox and shanty,
 the tattooed lady dancing,
 turning time and in her time beguiles.
 And the giant who belches in his soup
 and longs to play Hamlet but instead
 wrestles a big, black bear--hairy and dark
 as a Russian monk.
 The midget - Jezebel who sings
Stormy Weather and becomes Hedda Gabler
 for a whiskey shot or toke.
 Ladies and Gents! My feral daughter
 who knaws bones all night,
 her three sisters, musicians if you please,
 village whores when the bookings are slow--
 their gypsy mothers blaspheme
 tea kettle cooked kernal pray rosaries
 for the lost trinity, for one wolf child.
 Shall I put them in a wagon?
 Display them town to town?
 Shall little fire tongue
 do fire, big bucks and cashbox?
 Shall hunchback bear songs
 in baskets, in reed upon reed
 woven under his button push
 and brash act?
 We boil the bones at dusk,
 meat falls away at twilight
 and we take up spoons and
 the alleys have no names,
 the streets have names but
 we forget.
 We forget as we count
 the day's wages
 stacked always against the toll.

THIS WOMAN

You purr your dreams till dawn
and black hours before, stars before
and maybe a cloud once there
once remembered a cloud drives you to madness.
In your Rio at Carnival many clouds and beds
and nights will rise and testimony.
While lost in arms and legs of dreams
the dream thigh easing up the the thigh of flesh.
You wake and startle then at the throngs of noon,
the grunts and shouts of men sweating honey,
the songs of women braiding wax.
Outside they labour, and you, mistress of knots,
the now middle-age daughter of begun dark child
washes her husband's testimony.
Watches testimony on T.V., changes testimony
when it messes its diapers.

To bed this woman is to put her cloud
around your cock and listen as mad sperm
makes pillage, to wake to the scrapping
of the clock's hands as they rap rap and shutter
noon - noon.
To dance the dance of this woman one needs dope
or drink or religion or needlepoint or coma.
To be this woman is to labour dark children
time and time again until your abandonment
is danced in a dream linking arms with
old women and young women,
until it ceases to make a difference.

IAN

He speaks of the feast in Sligo
and no work in Dublin,
but his eyes laugh;
two children in blue summer smocks
cajoling among the landscape
of jobs that broke back bent face
to cry in lager.
And he remained decent
through the whole obscenity.

Through the streets on a Saturday afternoon
he winks at the flower ladies,
they know him, they know me.
They smell the drink on us and know
we have been sorting our dreams
in dark places where the men who dare
lay it all on the table.
And women bless the testament
with their hard hands and twenty years
on this earth no work a baby
and last night he was drunk
for fucksake. . . I think there's another
in me now.

Me and the boys, he says
me and the young boys
all live in a basement--
we've decent jobs now
but for how long.
'Course it's worse in Belfast.
His face reddens with the cold and drink.

In the north there is insurrection
the south fares better, but not by much
not on much but always too much.
We've set off down St. Ann Street
at least five pubs before we blur
and we'll make them all
raze our brains, blow our souls out
before holy hour, across the Liffey
before not a jar boys drink up lads.
And we survive, we live to wake
to the blood and chicken yoke
smeared on our window pane.
And the churn churn clank churn
as our tenaments fall around us.
As we clutch Dublin, madly as madmen
clutch dreams before the sedative.
We clutch our pitiful dark stairs
that render us into the streets
or plod us up to the charnal
and bare bulb water cold mirror warped
and lay down to clutch at dreams
and remain decent through the whole obscenity.

DAVID LEWIS



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