

HIKA Literary Magazine

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Fall 1993

**HIKA - Fall 1993**

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**HIKA**



All I know about music is that  
not many people ever really hear it.

*James Baldwin*



# HIKA

Volume LIV, Number 1

Fall 1993

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*Cover: Alanna and Jessica (ant bite)  
by Heather Knape*





DOMBOSHAWA

I  
wouldn't give up  
the fuchsia sky of Domboshawa,  
hands of beauty cupped closed around me  
joy in stereo.  
I was talking to a goat, but he ran away,  
and now it's just a skittering drumbeat,  
the sinking orange sun,  
the spiky trees,  
and me.

*Kristin Shrimplin*

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John

They said we bonded be-  
cause we rowed a boat to-  
gether. On escape Break.  
But You had not rowed one in over  
30 years, and then it was only  
your first time. Since separated  
from your wife of  
26 years.

They reported that the rowing was an  
“improvement” for you  
as was my entertaining manner  
—in a place like this.  
And don’t you know, They  
even informed the Syringe Head  
of your “frequent placid” smile.

But  
we did not bond because of a boat.  
and You never loved your wife of 26 years.  
and I was as good for you as  
the secondhand shirt i let you wear.  
that, of course, only matched the  
placidity that you  
never proposed—  
just loose moronic lip  
twitchings  
from your meds.

So my friend, what then  
did peace us together  
in this broken place?  
Was it the illegal sulfur tip  
exchanges through clandestine handshakes  
Or the futile decaf-coffee that  
we  
pumped to each other  
while others were gripping  
their bed bars,  
alone?  
Or maybe it was the way you shielded  
your eyes from mine,  
turning your greasy head  
as pancakes would fly  
from fork tremors.

maybe it was the  
Church and AA.

No John.

What peaced us together  
was loosing our peaces and  
pieces again and  
again  
Until the only Savior—  
for people like us—  
was the crackpot priest  
down the hall.

## Boxer

**J**anuary. My father is in the black casket. Mother cries dramatically into a white handkerchief. Aunts in dark dresses hang heads with muscular uncles. Cousins that I do not recognize flit between flowers and refreshments. My father lies still in the black casket.

I am nineteen years old. A sharply cut blue suit fits tightly around my well muscled chest and biceps. I am powerfully large and handsome, standing tall in the back of the room. Between dark dresses and unknown cousins I can see my father in the black casket. I am not sad or tired. I am not the dead one. Mother cries dramatically on the shoulder of one of the black dresses. A muscular arm wraps around her waist.

I am an amateur boxer. I know what it is to fight and to hurt and to be hurt. I am undefeated in eight fights. My twice broken nose tilts. I have rich friends who are throwing a party tonight at a mansion. In the cold winter dawn Mother cried "O for the death of a father." I shrugged.

I am looking at a room full of what does not matter. They are not me. I shift my body, feeling the power in those muscles. They push out against the dark silk. Mother sits despondently accepting the sympathies of a dark dress. An unknown cousin is alone among the yellows and pinks of flowers sent to a dead man. She is young and pale.

I walk across the room to stand beside her. Her skin is white and youthful. She looks up at me with green eyes that are void of pain or experience. They do

not lie and have never been lied to. She shudders minutely.

"I'm sorry about your father," she says quietly. Her voice is girlish and pure. She cannot look into my hard blue eyes. Her gaze ticks between my face and my body. I can see attractions building around us.

"He was a good man," I lie deeply. He is bland in the black casket. I take a step forward. I am a boxer. She moves back.

"How old are you," I ask.

"Nineteen," she lies. I can tell she is barely sixteen, if that. Her blond hair falls over pale skin. I slide closer. I know what it is to be hurt. She stumbles back.

"There's a party at my friend's house. Come with me."

"Right now?" Her voice trembles. She is so young and white. I take a step forward, each step balanced like a cat. She has nowhere to go. She leans back. One small translucent hand rests on the black of the casket edge. My heart twists at the image.

"Right now," I say calmly. She is undecided. Her feet shift themselves in ridiculous heels. Her free hand grasps at nothing. I know how to hurt. I look into her green eyes and see nothing but my reflection. I half turn my head. Calculated emotions skip across my face.

Pain. Her hand tightens on the black casket. Little white knuckles curl up with smooth dark wood. Sorrow. Her sculpted torso shifts right, then left on childish hips. Loss. She does not know what to do. Her free hand slides down the side of her dark dress.

Halfway to Disappointment she decides. At my broken brother's funeral I had to go to Anger. I am more powerful now.

"Let me get my coat," she says with wide green eyes. She walks with my blue eyes on her. Her coat is red and stylish. She walks back to me with anticipation and fear in her eyes. She smells fresh and clean. My father lies in the black casket.

I grab her hand and lead her towards the door. Mother intercepts us. She puts her blue veined hands on black dress hips.

"I forbid you to leave your father's funeral!" she shrieks dramatically. The unknown cousins twitter like birds. Muscular uncles grumble on the arm of downtrodden aunts.

I walk slowly past Mother. I do not look at her. She turns and screams "O for the death of a father!"

I look back. The girl hesitates on my arm. I see the room as through a tunnel. It is miles away already. My hand is on the door to the snowy outside. My little mother cries dramatically into a white handkerchief. Tiny dark dresses blend with muscular uncles. Small cousins nervously flit. My father lies in the black casket.

I have rich friends. They have rich parents who leave their mansions for weeks at a time. I am standing inside such a place with a pale green-eyed girl. She has a red coat and a drink.

I don't mess with alcohol or drugs. I am a boxer. I know what it is to hurt and be hurt. I must stay healthy and powerful.

The room is bright and ornate. Couches and tables sprawl across its vastness. My rich friends are all here. They drink and smoke loudly. I am a calm giant in the corner, with a girl I met at a funeral I barely remember. Even my friends are scared of me.

I see someone I do not know. He is as big as I am if not bigger. He is in a corner as well. He is as black a

man as I have ever seen. Suddenly I am scared of his blackness, of his huge arms and chest, of his skin like a cloak of shadow. Our eyes meet.

I tense into alertness. We have the same stare. Texans have this stare. Pure Irish blood has this stare. Powerful young men have this stare. Men who fight and win have this stare. It is a dangerous look and we both know what will follow.

I move as if to walk past him. I brush him slightly with my shoulder. He pushes me to the side with his huge arm. We turn to face each other. He awaits my push. I am tired of ritual. I am scared of his immense blackness. I close my eyes for a second.

He throws a punch that blurs blackly against the light of the room. I can't follow it. It strikes me on the cheek. The fist has barely landed before another slams in from the other side. I fall to one knee.

I look slowly to my side. My rich friends are watching with drinks in their hands. The room is quiet. The lights are bright. I look up. Great nostrils flare in anger on a face outlined in magnificent contrast to the bright white light. I am terribly scared. My head throbs as the black face melts and shifts. My father's black coffin stands over me. The body inside is pale and dead. I cry out. "Father!"

The black face returns. My cry has surprised him. He takes a half step back. I am a boxer. I know how to hurt.

Anger grows in me as I move towards my hesitant opponent. I had lost my power for a moment. I had fallen and cried out. My right arm moves back and swings forward. My fist slams into the off-balance man.

I hit him harder than I have ever hit anyone. My hand is buried in the side of his torso. I feel it sink into flesh, beyond flesh, into organ. He collapses like a brained fish.



I stare down at the black man. He is crumpled like a broken toy, holding his side and gasping. He rolls to one side and vomits onto the carpet. His great white eyes flutter.

He looks up at me, unseeing. My leg moves back and hurtles forward toward his midnight face. I half-expect to see his head fly off, but my boot merely drives him backwards. Blood comes from somewhere.

"Jesus!" says a rich friend and moves to help him.

"Get him out of here," suggests another rich friend and suddenly the girl is on my arm pulling me upstairs, away.

My knees are weak. I do not know where I am. I let the pale girl help me up stairs carpeted in oriental patterns. Somehow we get into a bedroom. She lays me down on a soft bed. I stare at the ceiling for minutes (hours) until she returns with a wet cloth to wipe my face clean of blood.

I roll onto my side and stare at the wall. She climbs lightly onto the bed and wipes my face. I can smell her fear. Her touch is gentle. She moves her body close to mine. Her small breasts press against my back. Her arm is hot on my shoulder.

"Who are you?" she asks. I can't see her face. I stare at the wall.

"What do you mean?" My head is starting to clear. Power moves back into its house.

"You pick me up at a funeral, bring me to a mansion and then beat someone near death. Who are you?"

I can't lose the image of my boot connecting with the side of the black face. I can't remember why I did that. He was down. He was beaten. I kicked him like a savage.

"I know who I am," I say.

She leans close. Her breath is warm on my cheek. Her body is trembling, pressed tightly against mine.

Her hand shakes on the towel. My body tenses against hers.

"Who are you?" she asks softly.

"Do you want me to show you?" I ask quietly.

She pauses. Her breaths are coming short and hot on my cheek now. She is shaking against me.

"Yes," she whispers almost inaudibly.

My father lies in the black casket. My mother cries "O for the death of a father!" My brother broken on the roadside. A white hand curled on the black coffin. My hand sinking into the black man's side. My boot connecting. Blood from somewhere.

I spin. She is thrown back, but not far enough. My full open hand snaps out and catches her on the mouth. It cracks as it reaches pink lip and pale flesh.

She does not shriek or cry out. She stares, part scared and part something I can't identify. It is an animal type of stare. A little drop of red blood rolls down her pale chin. Her red coat lies on the bed. Her green eyes are animals.

And then she pulls me towards the bed, all hair and legs and willing softness. I turn her inside out with blood on my face. My father lies in the black coffin.

## Four Shops in Kensington Market

In Kensington Market, I hear music  
from the mouths of foot-long silver fish  
displayed in windows of shops next to boxes  
of oranges stolen daily by an oily child.

I am hypnotized by dangling chickens  
made anonymous with paper hoods,  
made moist with the rain of Canadian November.  
I dream about them trembling, trying to dance.

On Tuesday, I bring a basket to the place  
where carnivorous customers draw numbers  
as female clerks tie each other's aprons,  
their fingers decked with wedding bands

and blood. But plant food in baskets, even  
that has died. Sugar canes are elephant veins.  
Tomatoes are hearts with collapsible chambers,  
are cold hearts thick with seeded blood.

Everything is alive.

## Lovers

Scratch a lover, find a foe.

Dorothy Parker

"The best of them are bad,"  
you said, and began the conversation  
mentioning the witch who rides her  
new boyfriend over the bald head  
of the moon, who left her broomstick-  
boy alone, cold, propped against a bench.  
Love is made of breasts and beasts. Desire  
flows backwards when nothing moves.

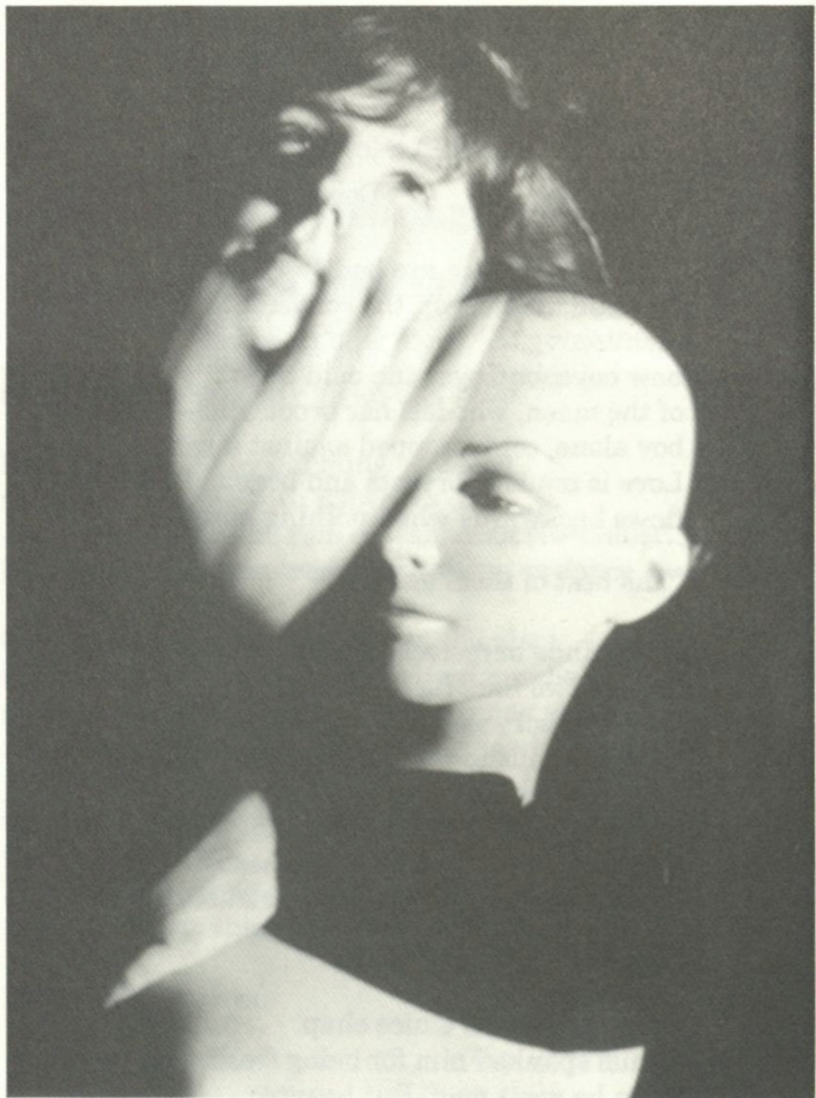
"The best of them are bad."

We include ourselves in that.  
We are two liars facing each other,  
pushing fact away with our hands  
until it swells in the middle,  
explodes, leaves remnants of evidence,  
which sprout new facts, resilient facts.  
The truth, stubborn as any passion  
blooms stronger with every destruction.

"The best of them are bad."

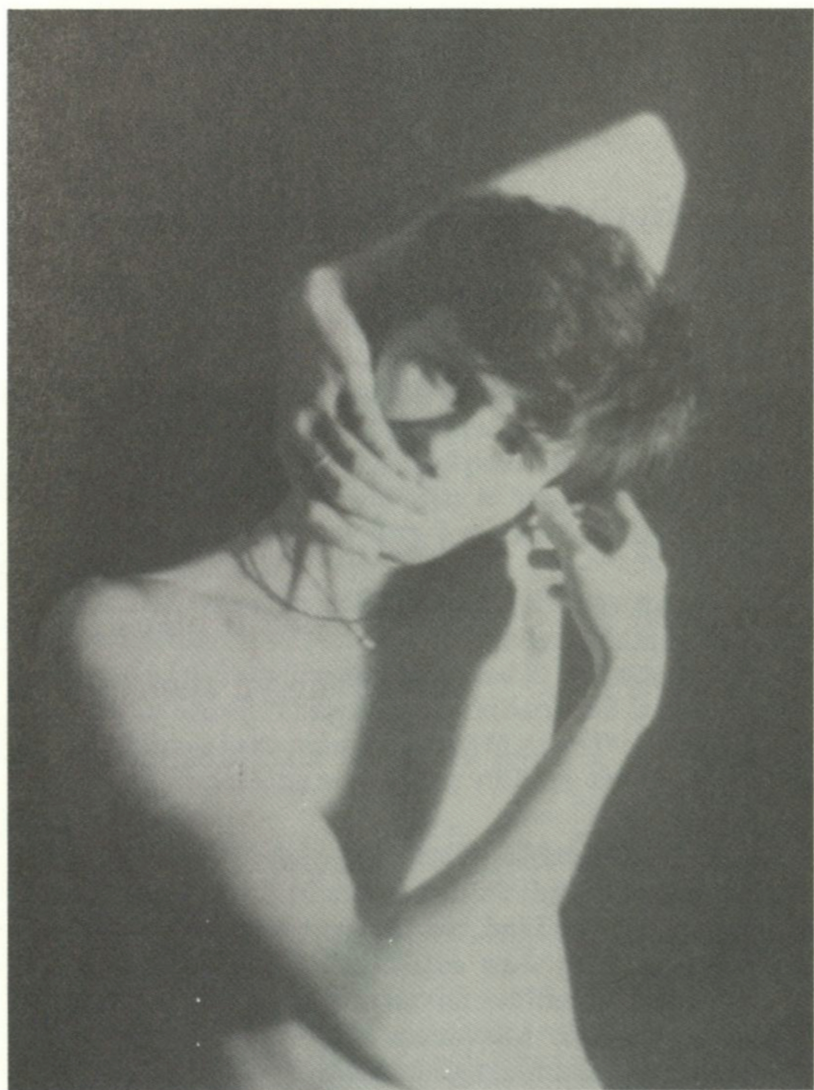
Once Cupid was a nice chap.  
Venus spanked him for being fresh.  
Then he went mad. But beauty,  
gods, the cosmos, we'll have none of that.  
Enemies, lechers, mistresses, distant  
cousins, blame those who cause and break  
the flow, who steal the gifts they once gave  
and dispose of them properly.

"The best of them are bad."



*Margaret M. Rea*

*Companion*



*Margaret M. Rea*

**Matt**

Jennisen McCardel 莫洁丽

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Spring Morning (a translation)

Spring sleep wakens to morning of peace,  
Everywhere birds are heard chirping.  
Night came with sounds of strong wind and rain;  
I think now of how many flowers are drooping.

春晓

春眠不觉晓，	Chūn mián bù jué xiǎo,
处处闻啼鸟。	Chùchù wén tí niǎo。
夜来风雨声，	Yè lái fēng yǔ shēng,
花落知多少。	Huā luò zhī duōshǎo。

孟浩然 Mèng Hàorán (689-740)

## Painting Mountains

(1)

I remember looking at the picture of our houses on the first day of school. I wanted to go home. Mine was the only one on top the mountains. My hair was braided that day, the day I painted the mountains. They were blue, like the color of the ocean from the airplane. I don't know why I picked the color blue. I never liked blue.

There was blue paint that day, the day the substitute was there. I was sick, but not really. I told mentieras, because I did not like school. I tried to be quiet because I had an accent. Then they would send me to the lady, I don't know her name. She tried to get me to talk. They thought something was wrong with me because I had an accent.

The teacher didn't like my mountains, she told me not to paint them. She did not think that houses go with mountains. I tried to remember, but I never was a very good listener. The mountains were always there, I think that's why the teacher did not like me very much.

I lost my cat in the mountains. The lady at the nursery gave her to me, but the mountains ate her up. I guess I painted the mountains because that is where she is. She was stuck in the mountains. I think that the witches were keeping her there. I wanted to go look for her, but my father said that I was just a little ninita and I would get lost in the mountains. So I played with the boy across the street. He couldn't leave the yard. His



parents told him not to cross the black fence in the front of his house. We had the same fence, only ours was yellow to match our jeep. Our gate was never locked; my father did not know to be scared. That's where the patio was, and he said the flowers did not need a gate, they were not going anywhere.

I did not like that little boy from across the street very much. He made fun of me. He laughed when I wanted to go look for my cat. He was just a stupid little boy, besides, he was just scared the mountains would eat him. The stupid little boy is jealous because I am not scared. I want to walk down to the mountains where my abuelita is. She doesn't pick coffee anymore, not since she sent my mami to walk over to this side. My abuela would come visit, but she is old and it is not easy to walk across the mountain that is in my backyard. I think that my cat is there, on the other side of the mountain, waiting for me. Little cat feet are not for walking on mountains. I will bring them flowers from the patio.

## (2)

I'd like to dance across the mountains when I go. The wind that laughs through the jungle canopy. I will follow the trail that my mother did leave. Her brother did not follow her through the jungle. He stayed in the mountains. I wonder sometimes why the tiger did not eat her up.

My father did not have to walk across the mountains. He looked soft with his blond hair and light skin. So they put some money into his pocket and sent him over. He left long ago, but I don't think that he ever understood, not the way my mother did. He did not stop to even look down into the valle' where my grandmother picked away her life and counted only in beans. He forgot to feel before he left. The tiger ate up his shadow.

## OCHOA

My mother ran from the tiger as he stalked her in the jungle. She escaped him but she can not go back. The trails are lined with her blistered feet. Then she walked across the mountains as if it were the flip of her hair. My grandmother saw and told me never to try walking across the mountains because los tigres are hungry.

I picked wildflowers from the field to take to my abuela. She likes the colors. I will carry them when I go over the mountains. That is my job; my sister learned to paint them and my brother has not looked, so it is my job to go see my abuela. She is lonely, and the flowers will comfort her.

## To The Ocean

Redwoods grow all the way up to the  
cracks in the ground  
and beyond.

I don't remember the car that took us there,  
But our approach was through the dunes  
Past artichoke fields in the fog  
and plants that waved to us like little animals  
While our towels flapped back.

The world came to focus  
Crouched in the sand over a small flame  
And melting wax.

As difficult to catch and hold as little fish,  
There must have been others around me,  
Chirping and pulling seaweed from the sea  
With numbed red fingertips.  
Rapid grey figures in the fog.

The sea was still asleep.  
Though we tugged at her blanket,  
She would not rise.

## Credo

I believe in winter, branches hold up the stars.  
I believe the stars are embedded in a web.  
God is a spider, I believe  
Blue eyes are from looking  
Too long into the river.  
Brown, the earth; green, the trees.

When I was a little girl, I knew  
death was temporary.  
Trees cut, holes drilled for a swing,  
In the rain the plastic rope frayed and rotted,  
I got splinters in my hands.  
The billy goat with glassy eyes like button-nuts was for so long  
tied close to the tree  
before we ate her.

The days worked fast on plastic tarps  
on outhouse coffee cans  
on plywood and broken glass.

I planted some sweet alyssum  
I dragged a pick across the yard,  
Talking to myself.

My books warped, rotted, fell apart.  
Jane and Spot got dirty.  
Toys broke, became pools to catch the rain.

The sun rose flashing  
tangled in the trees.  
Only nature stays new.

## Credo

I believe, yes.

That forces interacting upon a cart on an inclined plane  
will make the cart either way, go or come  
or stay (and also that you could paint the cart red)

If the cart drops from 8 meters perpendicularly  
then I believe it will fall at a rate of speed  
easily calculated (it would probably smash perpendicularly, too)

And perhaps then the pressures upon impact will  
force sections of the cart apart, which we may then  
burn for 17.04 lumens of light, or  
(or you could keep marbles in the cart)  
(I believe that you could)

Lisa Marie Bidlingmeyer

Ernst, Max (1891-1976)  
(An Artist's Credo)

You sit under a sky of smoke and blackbirds  
but look out, past the universities and armies,  
to the gothic horizon

An image:

Two children are menaced  
by a nightingale.

In an oak-finished headboard,  
a water-stained ceiling,  
sickness turns to inspiration  
so you set your visions loose;  
they scatter like living marbles  
across the floor  
but you trap them;  
rub them into frottage,  
caged into collage.

It's an odd way to deal with things  
but birds were always there

frightening  
they loomed overhead  
even the wrens were vultures  
or was it in mourning  
that they formed black processions  
turned into mad death-dances.

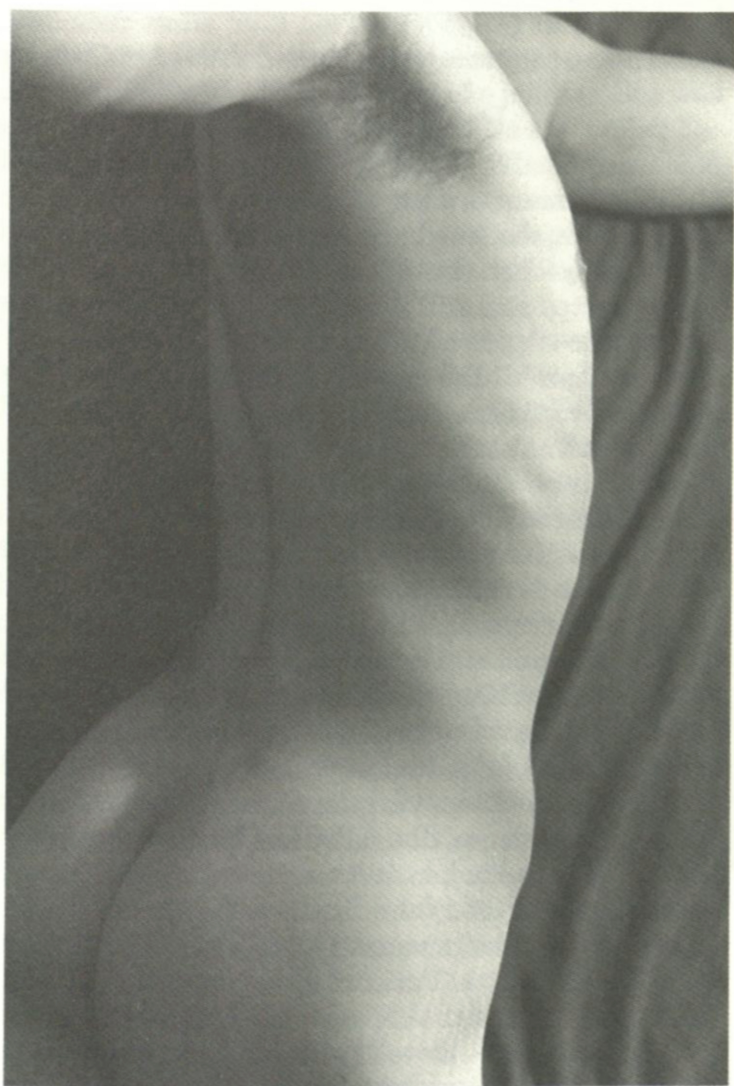
So goes life;  
the people turn to their priests  
and you to your palette;  
    you paste down feathered icons,  
    idols for a cult of art and  
    irreverence

suddenly sensible

Mental photographs after the rain,  
    the image:  
    the afterimage:  
    your soul.

A dusk swallow flitting upon mediums  
turning transparent boughs tangible;  
strange fruit fall  
into the dawn's light. The shadows die,  
the irrational is reasoned now -  
the nightmare images cast off.

You reach long ibis arms towards  
the nighttime sky  
and searching, find the sun.



*Kim Highfield*

Untitled



## Patience Rose

**H**er name was Patience, and it had been even before she was born. Her mama would laugh easily when she talked about three weeks later than expected and still the child didn't want to come out, put up such a fight, thought the baby was gonna be right with her 'til the day she died. The name on the girl's birth certificate was Rose Agatha, the first name after her mama's mama and the second, after the lady who'd been so Christian as to take in a pregnant woman named Sadie from Kentucky. Sadie knew right from the beginning that the girl was special, was slower, more patient. The woman understood that the child's actions came a little sluggishly sometimes, that she had to be told orders more than once, that her eyes seemed to see differently than people's. Since Sadie understood, she was tolerant of disturbances triggered by her daughter's "patience".

Miss Agatha Bumgart wasn't tolerant nor did she call the girl Patience. She called her by ringing a silver bell and referred to her as Rose. It was Miss Agatha's belief that everybody, no matter who they were or where they might have come from, should learn to work. So as soon as Patience Rose was able to walk steady she became the old woman's body — her arms and legs and eyes — as well as her mama's sweeper and runner and washer and duster.

It was afternoon in late winter, the time when children think it's finally spring, but their parents send them out in thick coats. The coats are quickly peeled off and end up held in small fists, dragging through slush. Sadie was on her way home from Sibilrud's Grocery

and passed child after child enacting this scene. They made her smile with her own memory of a child and caused her to click her tongue against her teeth, shaking her head with the knowledge of a mother. She was still thinking of those useless coats as she pulled her legs up the steps to the back porch. When she walked through the kitchen door she saw Patience Rose sitting at the table, her eyes staring at something invisible on the tabletop and two streaks of tears marked with tired sunlight.

Ten minutes went by before Patience would look at Sadie and another ten before the child would tell about her chore of dusting in the library. And tell about Miss Agatha dragging her chair to a spot just so, a place where she could watch Patience and still see the goings on outside. And about how Patience didn't get to go in the library much, she really didn't know when she'd been in there before, how much prettier it was than the other rooms. And how Miss Agatha kept telling her to hurry up and Patience had a lot to do yet and Miss Agatha wanted her to get out because Patience wasn't doing anything but touching the belongings and Miss Agatha could tell Patience was fixing to take something. And Patience hurried as good as she could and she was hurrying real hard and her dust cloth went over a vase and the vase looked prettier than everything else. And Miss Agatha told her again that she was taking too long and Patience jerked the cloth away. And Patience moved too fast and her elbow went back and hit the corner of the table behind her and it hurt bad so she jerked her arm forward, but the arm went too far and hit the vase. And she was trying to be as good as she could but Miss Agatha never cared no time before this one and she didn't care today neither. And Patience's arm knocked the vase and it fell loud on the floor and sounded like music and disappeared in tiny sharp pieces.

And Patience jumped and Miss Agatha hurried into the room and Patience tried to pick up the pieces because she knew this was bad but her elbow still hurt and the pieces cut into her hands. And Miss Agatha didn't care, she yelled at Patience odd, addled, dull. She yelled at Patience that her mama best teach her how to do simple things because she can't do anything at all, not even dust. She yelled get out of this room. She yelled dumb white trash is worse than dumb nigger. She yelled when Sadie gets home to tell her to clean up, then tell her to come to the parlor, if that isn't too difficult to remember.

The child hidden under Sadie's arthritis and the mother in her mind ran together, and they rocked Patience until she stopped shaking. Then they spoke in a low voice, "Miss Agatha wuz kind when she was younger, when you wuz waitin' to come out. This wuzn't real long ago but she grew old quickly. When I come it wuz her and her brother; she wuz already a wida. I think she had a boy thet died when he wuz real young, but she don't talk 'bout him. Her brother got sick 'n' died not too long after I come, and Miss Agatha got fatter and sat in that chair, watchin' other people ou'side who could move.

"Miss Agatha's voice wuzn't always hard like now, when I first come she used ta sing hymns while her brother played the piana. But after he died that voice got sharper, and if she called 'Sadie', she said it two, three times 'fore I wuz able to git there from the kitchen. It wuzn't jist me she did this to, there were four or five wen I come here, but they all got tired of Miss Agatha sayin' they'd got sloppy 'n' old 'n' weren't worth nothin' anymore. They got sick a hearin' that the only reason she kept them around wuz 'cause it wuz her duty, her Christian duty, and no one wuz ever thankful to her. They all left, either found 'nother job or jist run off, and I wuz the only one who stayed. She says the

only reason I stay is 'cause I think I'm gonna git her money when she dies. She tells me I might as well leave now...but — and this is what I want you ta listen ta Patience Rose — I stay 'cause she needs someone. She is alone, and I know that whin someone's 'lone they git real mean and they say things that they shouldn't jist so they hear themselves talk. You understand Patience?"

The girl had stopped crying. She didn't respond but sat slowly blinking her eyelids rhythmically.

"And she likes you, even though you cain't tell too often. She kinda thinks you're what's keepin' me here, 'cause I got you 'n' she thinks I want the money fer you...But what you should know is that she really likes you, so don't cry when she's harsh. She don't understand that you're patient. Honey, how could she understand your patience? It's bin so long since she wuz close ta anybody that she don't remember that we all got some patience in us.

"You jist remember that I understand your patience and it makes you real special. Someday you'll know what I mean...Now I want you to go on and take these loaves over to the Baptist Church, they're havin' a bake sale and Miss Agatha wanted to send somethin'. I gotta start dinner. You 'member where the Baptist church is...down past the big park. It's nice out; on your way back you kin walk slow and look at the new leaves on those maples on Prescott. Here's the bread. I want ya ta pull on yer coat. 'ts behind the door?"

Patience moved her body into the coat and pressed the bread between folded arms. Sadie smiled at her and the girl smiled back, her lips stretching slowly so that the full effect of the large smile didn't come until she'd left the house and fell on an empty yard. Her mama stayed seated and ignored the summoning of a distant silver bell and elderly voice. When both sounds had

long ceased, the woman stood and moved solidly into the parlor.

Four days had gone by since Miss Agatha had yelled, and Patience Rose was trying to be better now. She wanted to show she wasn't "addled", just patient, so she crouched in the hallway that ran next to the parlor and waited for Miss Agatha's bell. While she crouched, her eyes followed dark running lines in the floorboards. Patience knew the lines moved, the way rainwater makes thin rivers down the street, only they weren't just like water because she knew the lines moved very, very slowly. They moved so slowly that most people thought they stayed still. It took someone real special to see them move, and she was going to. She knew the only way to watch the moving was to slow down too. Maybe if she slowed enough she'd be able to fall into them and move with them and go where they went when the floor ran into the wall.

The bell rang. Patience Rose jumped up to hurry into the parlor, but her knees had locked when they were crouching and she stumbled, falling before she could regain her balance. She could hear Miss Agatha was saying something but couldn't make out what it was. Patience Rose picked herself up and walked into the parlor, expecting a glare and an order, but Miss Agatha was too busy concentrating on getting out of her chair to bother with the girl. The old woman clamped her fatty hands on the arms of the chair and raised her body up cautiously. Then she shuffled across the parlor floor, neck stiff, past a confused look on the face of Patience Rose, across the hallway, and to the door of the library.

"Rose, you may go into the library and choose a book."

Patience Rose stood and stared at Miss Agatha. She stepped into the doorway and stopped.

"Miss Agatha..."

"What."

The old woman said the word rather than asked it and the girl's voice got quieter.

"I do' know what...book..."

"A person read books, Rose. I know you can't read but maybe if you have your own book you will learn how."

"Than' you, Miss Agatha. Dumb people like me read?"

"I don't understand you. Normally when I want you to talk, you never say anything and now you won't stop speaking. Simply go to the shelves and choose a book."

Patience Rose moved to the wall of books and her eyes shifted among the colored lines of the books' spines. She didn't know why Miss Agatha was doing this, but Patience was just trying to keep her eyes on the books so she wouldn't look over to the table where the vase had been. A sigh sounded behind her and Patience tried to focus hard and pick a good book so Miss Agatha would think she was smart. Patience wanted to stretch and drag her fingers over the colored lines, across one row, reach to the next, go across that one. She knew it would feel good and her hand would want to keep moving from colored line to line to line. She knew she would be able to do that all day long and never get tired, but she knew Miss Agatha would think she was "odd", so she kept her hands at her side.

"Girl, it is hot in here. Just take any one, they are all alike to you anyway."

Patience Rose pulled the colored line directly in front of her face and it fell heavily into her palm. She carried it gently to the doorway and Miss Agatha snatched it as she walked past.

"A Dickens'...humph. You be careful with this. I don't want to see it ripped," Miss Agatha pushed the girl out of the room and loudly shut the door behind

them. "I'll notice if there is something wrong with it. You can stay out of the parlor now. I don't need you. Start reading your new book."

Patience crouched to the hall floor as Miss Agatha's shuffles grew quieter and ended with a long, heavy breath. The girl opened the book and began turning the pages. The lines on the floorboards raced by imperceptibly and Sadie served Miss Agatha's tea unnoticed as Patience lifted and flattened each new page with its long rows of marks. She kept the rhythm of the rows until the third time her mama called her for supper. She got into the kitchen and showed Sadie what she had been given. Her mama didn't seem surprised and just nodded while banging a serving spoon soundly against a plate.

The girl was occupied with sweeping the parlor floor, when she heard the noises coming from the kitchen. She was thinking about her new book which she hardly put down while trying to ignore Miss Agatha's sharp comments on the girl's effectiveness. Her mama was making cakes that were to be Miss Agatha's contribution to another bake sale, and Patience Rose stopped sweeping to listen to the noises. The old woman told her to quit idling and Patience concentrated on her sweeping.

But the noises came again, sounds of feet hitting the floor fast and of low, scared moaning. Then these low moans freed themselves and ran high and long. Miss Agatha started ringing her bell, and Patience ran towards the kitchen. She got to the doorway and saw her mama staggering out of the house. Every closing of Patience's eyes froze the scene before her. The door of the stove open and flames reaching out sharp, fast, bright. Blink. Outside her mama completely hidden in violent color. Blink. Tripping, falling hard on knees. Blink. Two strings of fire with fingers at the ends

raising up. Blink. Flopping over. Blink. Kicking. Blink. Twisting. Blink. Wriggling. Blink. Fire quieting. Blink. Smoke. Blink. A quiet blackened body. Blink.

It was nearly two weeks after the burial that Patience Rose opened the door to a tall suited man and led him into the parlor. Miss Agatha ordered her to the kitchen to help the new woman or out back to weed the garden if the new woman didn't have a chore, just anything other than standing in the doorway swaying back and forth. The new woman set her to bringing in the dry clothes from the line. Patience Rose was taking them to the upstairs closet when she passed the parlor's rarely closed doors. She stopped for a minute and heard Miss Agatha speaking.

"...didn't even help her own mother. I got there and she was just standing at the door, just watching her die. I just don't know..."

The girl started walking again and began humming a song her mama had sung during thunderstorms.

After breakfast the next day, the new woman helped Patience Rose pack a small bag. The new woman didn't tell the girl why she was packing and Patience didn't want any explanation. Underclothes, hairbrush, a doll sewn together by her mama, the book. When the bag was packed Patience went into the parlor to wait, as the new woman had told her to do, and found Miss Agatha looking out at Excelsior Street. The girl put the bag down and crouched next to it, eyes on the floor, having decided to see the lines in the floorboards move at least once before she left. Miss Agatha started talking.

"Rose, you will be going to a place named Copperwood. Mr. Wulmann, the director, should be here shortly. Copperwood is the best in the area and someone with no means of support should be very



thankful for this. Most orphans don't get this kind of care. At least I assume you're an orphan, your mother never mentioned a father."

Patience Rose had raised her head and was watching Miss Agatha's hair turn silver then white then blue as her head shifted in the sunlight.

"I will be getting reports as to how you're doing, and if things sound fine, maybe you can come back here for Christmas. Copperwood will be able to help you in ways that you need...Your mother would appreciate what I'm doing for you," Miss Agatha sounded winded. She added this last statement as an afterthought, and its falseness sat in the air between the room's two occupants.

They sat silently until a brown buggy slowed to a halt in front of the house. Patience Rose stood, picked up the bag, and went to Miss Agatha's chair. Before she could talk, the old woman started speaking, "I know you packed that book, so you might as well take it with you, even though I should probably make you leave it here. You won't have any use for it at Copperwood. It won't do you any good there."

Patience really didn't listen, she was watching the leaves shaking on the tree branches in the front yard. "Than' you, Miss Agatha," was all she said. She and the man walked to the buggy and then Excelsior was as empty as usual. Miss Agatha picked up her silver bell and rang it severely for the new woman.

Long hallways, high windows, dirty light, rubbing sweaty hands together and watching tiny balls of dirt appear on the palms. Sitting on a big, chair, legs hanging, stockings getting hot, stockings making hanging legs hot and itchy. Watching from big eyes. Watching the tall man talk to a woman. The woman was wide like her mama. The tall man glanced at big deep eyes, turned and quickly passed under one of the high

windows. Following the woman through more long hallways. The woman didn't walk as slow as her mama had and her mama had brown hair, not red. Floorboards of brown wood like at Miss Agatha's, but no shine like Miss Agatha's. No bending down to watch the dark lines. The woman saying come along.

Small rooms. Men with short beards. Bag taken by another woman who walks fast. Nodding yes and no with small spoken words. Big hands. Strong light. Different dress. Noises coming through walls. Finally big room. Long beds. Looking like black bugs Patience plays with. Long black bugs that are still 'til Patience pokes them. Hard shiny bodies jump up and four legs pop out, running into the grass. Being led to an empty long bed. Patience sitting on bed to make it bounce up and make little legs run it away.

Looking at person and person and person. Noises coming from them. Noises like Patience makes when she wakes up and hears old mama songs being sung in the kitchen by a voice that isn't her mama's. Noises like Miss Agatha's mad about the vase. Noises that hurt Patience's head. Noises that make Patience bounce on the bed hard hoping to wake up the sleeping legs.

Underneath the bed, her bag looking hidden. The woman helping her into a blue sleeping dress. Pushing under thin blanket. Good night, the woman saying, big day, tired, sleep. The woman walking away past all the noises, not turning her head. The room getting very dark and many of the noises quieting, except for noise sounding like her mama's moaning, her mama's screaming. Reaching into the bag. Pulling out book. Head heavy. Big eyes closing. Book in bend of skinny arm.

The nurse opened the file and marked the date. Six years and three months since arrival. Quite a time not to speak, but not extraordinary. The nurse tiredly wrote down the incident.

"Rose Agatha was in the courtyard with the other patients, looking at the book she carries. Another patient, Lucille, walked over and reached to touch the book. Rose Agatha then slammed the book shut and spoke loudly and slowly. Her words were, 'This is my book. Go away.' Then she returned to turning the pages as if nothing happened. Dr. Maddock will be notified of this occurrence when he arrives in the morning of the 14th."

When the nurse finished, she deposited the file on a high stack and, her day completed, left the building as quickly as her swelled ankles could support her.

Patience Rose was comfortable in a high-backed rocking chair, moving forward and back, turning one yellowing page after another. A nurse who'd been at Copperwood as long as Patience, disturbed the concentration on the rows and took her into the doctor's office. The doctor greeted Patience as Rose Agatha, a name to which she was finally able to respond to automatically.

"This might seem surprising to you but Copperwood is in some financial trouble. You do not have to worry about the various reasons this is happening, though the main cause has been the war. Do you remember us discussing the war, Rose Agatha? Well, we will have to close Copperwood for awhile, possibly until the war is over, but we are not positive what will occur after that. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Patience Rose, who hadn't spoken since that ash faced woman tried to take her book years ago, nodded and watched the doctor's eye twitch.

"Good. You do not have to worry about what you will do now. We have contacted the woman you used to live with...Miss Agatha Bumguart. She is quite elderly now and mostly confined to her bed, but she knows you will be returning to her home. She tells us you used to help

around the house and seems glad you will be able to again."

The deep-set eyes that stared at his quivering eyeball were as unreadable as they usually were, but as he talked, he had noticed his patient's hands tighten around the spine of her book until they were a bloodless white.

"Rose Agatha, what do you think of this?"

Patience Rose's eyes broke from their focus and played to the high window above the doctor's head. An almost imperceptible moan forced out of her lips and she said quietly, "I not odd. I not addled. I patient. Miss Agatha..."

The doctor's forehead relaxed and he smiled, "Don't worry, Rose Agatha, Miss Bumguart remembers you. She understands. When you go back you can show her how you've grown. The last time she saw you was when you were a little girl. About age seven, wasn't it?"

As his patient nodded he continued, "You're older now, you can take care of Miss Bumguart and show her how good you will be to her. You can do that, Rose Agatha, it will be good for both of you--I'm positive."

Patience's eyes slowed and watched her hands loosen their grip on the book. She nodded again, after a moment.

The few nights before her departure from Copperwood had been difficult. She didn't eat much, but the nurses didn't seem to notice anymore. Her body had tossed and twisted in her sleep and she would wake, still tired, to find her book had fallen to the floor sometime during the night. She would pick it up and try hard to smooth out the pages, but small creases would escape her fingers. This upset her, causing agitation to build, heightening visions of her mama and the house and Miss Agatha. Turning the pages of the book was the only thing that comforted her, as it

had comforted her when she'd first arrived at Copperwood. And knowing that the book was in her bag was what comforted her as she returned to Miss Agatha's house on Excelsior Street.

Since Patience had been at Copperwood, she had not become familiar with the modernization of the country, so she did not realize how out of date and behind Miss Agatha's house had become. The pictures frozen years ago in her mind melted into the images she saw when she came back. Everything was the same until she stepped into the parlor and saw Miss Agatha's chair empty. Then she heard the silver bell from above and automatically moved to answer it.

A short woman who had let Patience in and had identified herself as the nursemaid, waved her hand, "Let her ring it. She's just gonna try ta order me ta stay, but you're here now and you kin take care of her. She seems to think you're still a girl," she sighed, "I know you got some problems, but the doctor says you'll take good care of her. And truthfully, if you hadn't a come, I'd a quit anyhow."

The woman ignored the bell so Patience did too, even though it made her hands sweaty and her feet clumsy. After fixing a pot of tea, the woman went upstairs, said her good-bye to Miss Agatha, and came back into the kitchen, wished Patience luck, and left.

Patience sat turning the pages of her book until evening came. She felt like waiting and turning until the rows of lines in her book swirled around her, but finally the ringing bell invaded her mind and stopped the movement of the rows. This break in her concentration angered her and she was halfway up the stairs before she remembered it was Miss Agatha she was going to face.

The old woman was laying in a large bed, fat hand gripped around the handle of the bell and was ringing it as mightily as her feeble muscles were able. She saw

Patience Rose and the sound stopped.

"Come closer."

Patience obeyed.

"Rose."

Patience answered quietly, "Yes Miss Agatha."

The old woman seemed to gather strength, "How long have you been here? You're as bad as that Glenda, not paying attention to a sick woman. Won't be sorry to see her go," Miss Agatha tried to shake her head in displeasure, but only managed to jiggle the flesh. "Well, Rose, where is my dinner? I still need to eat."

The hesitation in Patience's action caused Miss Agatha to speak again, "You cook, don't you?"

There was no response from Patience.

"I know you're slow but you must have a little of you mother in you somewhere...If you haven't cooked anything yet that is fine, maybe it will take you time to get used to being here. Just go make my dinner now."

Still Patience didn't move.

"Rose! Can't you hear me?...You seem to have gotten more addled than you were, if that is possible."

"I not addled."

"What did you say?"

"I not addled, Miss Agatha. I just patient," Patience's voice came unexpectedly to her.

"Yes, Rose, yes. I know your mother used to say you were 'patient'. That doesn't matter. Go make my dinner."

"Miss Agatha, I not addled or odd. I patient."

"I'm getting tired of this. I want my dinner."

"I patient."

"Rose! Go cook my dinner now!"

"I cain't cook." The words were out before she could stop them.

"For the Lord's sake Rose! They told me you had gotten cooking and sewing lessons. Is this not true?"

Patience Rose didn't know how to answer and her

eyes fluttered around Miss Agatha's figure.

"I knew Copperwood wasn't terribly respected, but I thought they'd teach you something. Now what am I to do? I can't very well make myself dinner, can I, Rose?... Well?"

"I sorry."

"That doesn't really feed me does it now?"

"I sorry, Miss Agatha. I not addled. I patient."

"Rose, for the final time — your 'patience' is obtuseness, dull-wittedness, stupidity. Your mother just tried to make you feel better. She knew you'd never be able to do any good to anyone. What she should have done is let you die when you were a child. It would have been better for both of you. Maybe she should have let you die just like you let her."

Miss Agatha had raised herself unsteadily onto her elbows and was glaring at Patience Rose's darting eyes. Through Patience's mind clicked the pictures of her mama's death. The screams. The paralyzed muscles in Patience's arms, legs, throat. Her mama had done all the screaming and running and moving for the both of them. The pictures and sounds came back and spilled out of Patience's mouth.

"Crying?! Oh, Rose, stop that. I don't know why you are crying now. You didn't cry then."

The moans from Patience's body stayed steady, not wavering, not expanding.

"Quit that. I can't stand that noise..." Miss Agatha fell back onto her pillow and her flesh stirred side to side once more.

The pictures were flying back brighter now, visions of the funeral, of the burning, of the vase, of Miss Agatha's angry face.

"Rose, I mean it. Stop!"

Pictures of dark lines in floorboards, of high windows and long hallways, of beds like bugs and people trying take her book.

"Would you stop that!? I couldn't stand it then when Robert would do it. I can't stand it now," Miss Agatha's body was writhing. The movement had begun as a trembling and now was jiggling the whole bed.

The pictures in Patience's mind filled up her sight and set her off-balance. She stumbled and knocked over the table which held Miss Agatha's medication, a cup of cold tea, the silver bell.

Miss Agatha's voice was vibrating uncontrollably and coming out barely above a whisper, "Your mother should have let you die when you were a baby, just like I let Robert die, any good mother would have...He was just like you. I did what was best for him....any good mother would have."

Patience stumbled out of the room not hearing Miss Agatha's last words, not hearing anything but her mama's moaning. She pitched down the stairs and sprawled long across the hallway. Her face was an inch from the lines in the wood, but she didn't see them. She picked herself up, ran to the kitchen, and snatched her book from the table. Falling onto the floor, she opened it and started flipping pages. She turned page after page until her eyes focused on the running rows of lines, until her mind slowed, until her chest stopped hurting, until her breath grew even, until morning came and the sun moved over the house, until night came again, until she realized the bell hadn't rung, until she concentrated so hard that the rows of lines on the pages blurred and stretched and wrapped around her mind and pulled her into them.





*Heather Knappe*

*Jessica*

## Gertrude

A woman's birthday.

Her friends come and take her to lunch  
and her family comes to take her to dinner  
—but she's back in her kitchen  
staying awake, staying busy,  
alive

by ripping tiny apricot flowers  
down.

She scrapes glue like honeycomb,  
plays musical furniture by moonlight  
rearranging filed memories.

Slowly, the color schemes change  
slowly, the yellowed photos disappear  
slowly, her eyes clear with the dawn,  
and again her walls are bathed in orange

again she smells the green-ness of geraniums  
she catches the glimpse of his phantom shadow

-Blinks-

And her friends have come to take her to lunch  
and her family has come to take her to dinner  
yet she sits in the orange kitchen  
ripping tiny apricot flowers  
down.

*Jill Penman*

---

Cornelia

She looked cleaner than most women, hair sleek  
dark and cut to the ear folded into caps  
for driving and walking her dogs she'd sneak  
into restaurants and cafes, taking laps

sometimes around the neighborhood, thinking  
in other languages that she'd learned in books  
not without some effort, though, while bringing  
tapes home, singing to me later with looks

of muted devotion, uprooted, thin  
syllables that could stroll into any  
soiree behind cool draperies and the ruin  
of tanned skin and warmed perfume that may marry

to any well-boned wrist, ankle or limb  
in the light of faded irises and gin.

## July

Reading Scientific American on a delayed flight, the plane couldn't jilt itself out of the runway as always the effort concentrated, not built like walking or beginning to walk, shadows crawling into one another, into one thrust from ground to air, and I wait like the salesman and the sunburnt gentleman wearing seersucker the forty minutes under the last pound of July heat.

You are waiting too, and waiting still as I make these words into the evening's mittens, to wear against cold conversation; you wait these forty minutes too, in shirtsleeves and opened windows that sift the air connecting inside your apartment.

What thoughts tiptoe through these minutes barefoot and awake at three in the morning, an hour never given to normalcy, little girls who ask for glasses of water in frayed braids?

—We are unapproachable in this kind of grace and the pale meeting of it around our own separate tables.

## Bread

Don't forget the pain that evening takes making bread  
for the night; the rise against the within of you—  
And if it were something else, stew, maybe, it would  
boil, harden the edges inside, make skin on top.

Now, you're free, without the hands haven't got  
time to churn this all up, no love directing patterns  
or smells; all of that happens outside, like the  
temperature, the climate of without.

It pulls itself together sidewise, from your fingernails  
drawing on, as evening folds itself shut and radio  
sounds thicken the air, collecting what's there  
blood, tendons, follicles, hair.

Lullabies for calm waking, still parting of the  
hours of nodding to light as it slips inside your thinnest  
limits, the tips of ears, as each pore lifts up  
mouth open and heavy.

To heat, but the kitchen of worries is left stale,  
untouched, all metal reflecting first loves, mean sadness  
hanging it down on the open curve of your eyelid on the  
edge, to watch it, notice it won't change, your sense of  
beginning wrought into these patterns here, no odor.

## Where V. Woolf Felt a Lamp

She makes little noises deep in her throat,  
howls caught in daylight,  
as she licks smooth her greasy rough coat,  
powerful breath letting go the smell of wet fur,  
curled around the base of my spine,  
head in my lap, twitches dreams of hunt,  
again and again gulps down a whine.

I met her by a pool when I was very small  
and she has grown around me tree and vine  
grown in circles scraping crawling.

I wait for the bite  
of a flea when, twisting, gums showing black,  
hunger in the self-eating gut  
will fire and wake.



*Portrait of Alexis*

Nicole Dreyfuss

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—*The Nation*



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