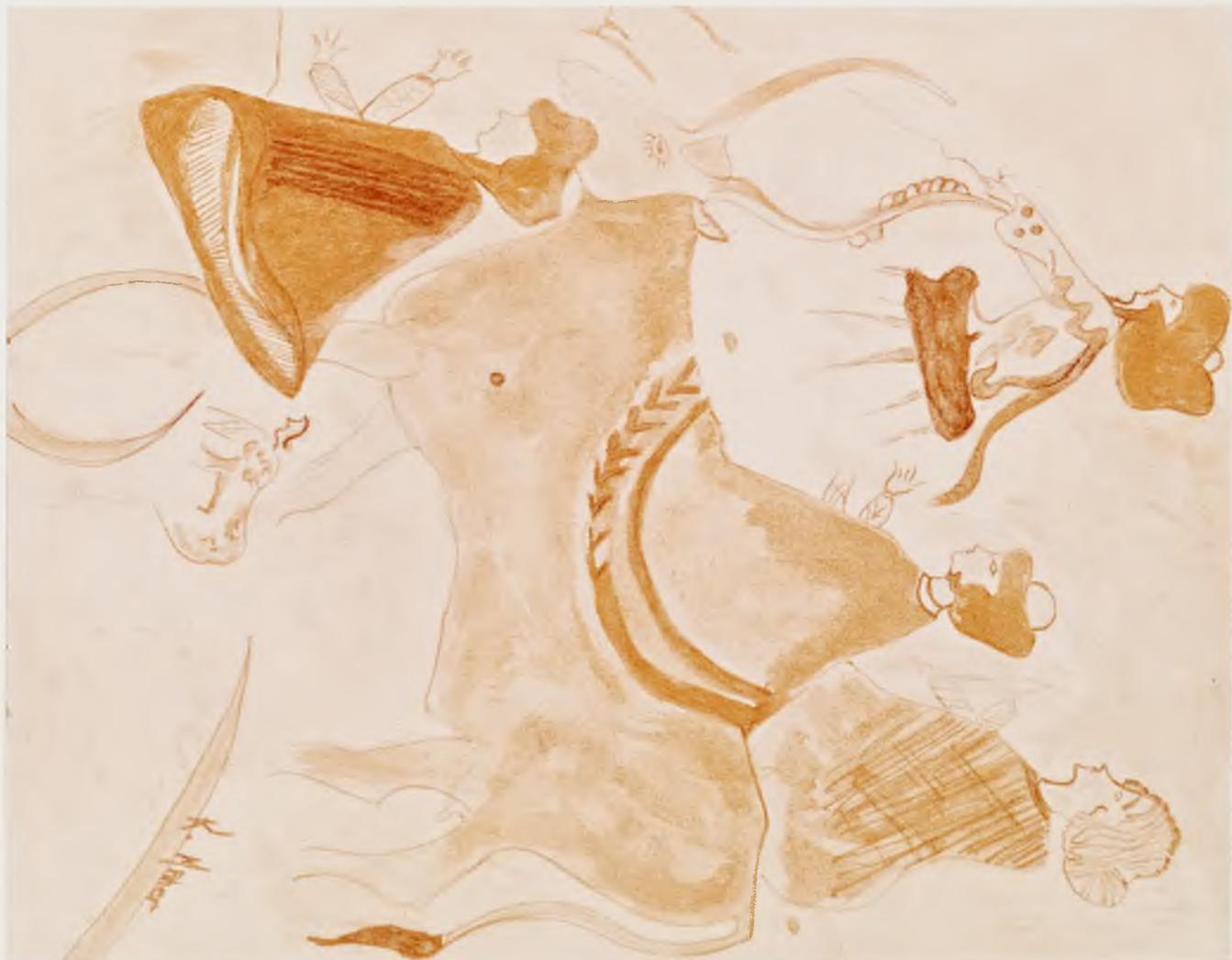


SPRING 1976

HEATWAVE



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Spring 1976

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Into My Sea

d.b.

come to me
through the narrow hallways.
reach me in the darkened caverns
where they dare not go.
rub against my silence, slowly.

my arms are too long
they hang heavy at my sides.
my feet are too slow
they shuffle safely; softly
down the quiet corridor
where green kelp grows.

i am underneath an ocean of time
submerged in a sea
where fish have ceased to live
and swimming
would only mean disaster.

i float along
unharmmed, unafraid.
the sea grown louder.
the noise of it strikes my ears
but bounces beyond me.

immunity is peace —
i am immune.
only you could touch me.
yet you linger above the foam,
your anchor is the limestone loam.
a rock that does not fall
into my sea.

Empty hellos and goodbyes never spoken. . .

d.b.

You're going backwards
traveling fast
toward a screaming horizon
that only meteorites can reach.
What does this mean?
You've burned a hole in his brain!

He is daunted,
daunted – haunted.
By your light, your bright,
Your reality.
He is transplanted/slanted: unenchanted.

Your jade eyes fade
And you trade
 your mind
 your blood
 your sanity
All for his crystalline touch.
His icicle tricycle.

You ride and ride
Your beauty lies
You shine too brightly
For his empty eyes.

The Kiss

L. I. ter Meulen

"They be pitted against one another, the woman an the man, but as the fable go this man eatin lion have a special affection for this good christian an the lion don't eat the christian like she supposed to, instead she rub her head along his shoulder an purr, an, for just a minute, history stand still."

SHE BE MARRIED QUITE YOUNG, SEVENTEEN TO BE EXACT, AN SHE bear a child her followin year. The yellow fever take her husband, oh, she did cry, boo hoo, but somethin been missin with her husband, she really don't feel much different without him than she did with him. But she cry, she miss the husband's arms around her an the intimate kiss that accompany their nights (which when she think of it now, happen more in her dreams than in the real place of their bed). Those times when there be no one to touch her, they bring her child to her, the mother be young an so full a life an the child be old enough to play with paints an listen to words, an the mother an the child play for hours.

She leave the husband's home an family when she become a widow. Oh, she might stay, the husband's family care well for her an treat her like someone special, but she wish to be at home. So she go to the house she growed up in, with her mother an her grandma, an her young sister an her stepfather, an she be at home. Her family bein from Baltimore bring the tastes an the style of the city with them, an the freer spirit an looser morals of a northern place, north, that is, to Virginia. An the stepfather be moody and the sister be beautiful an talented an the mother be a practical woman carryin a royal manner wherever she go an her grandma be a whirlwind a notions, alert to all that she have interest in. Grandma teach the family how to read, an she teach the servants how to read; the word slave ain't allowed. Grandma's own mama didn't read an grandma remind the family always of this "impoverishment" in her own mama's life. Grandma teach the woman to read at an early age, as the woman's mother learn before her, and she teach the favored servants, "negroe" bein one of the first words she learn. Eeny meeny miny mo catch a. . . no dear her mother say, that's a nasty word an her daddy bein a dutchman teach her to say dutchman, catch a dutchman by the toe. Neighborin Virginians consider the family eccentric an stupid (teachin them nigras to read an write, even suppin with em on the back porch) but act respectful to the family's worth.

Now when she have the feel of a man's arms about her an the pushin an pullin of makin love, she have to know it again, an again, an she take each opportunity to know it again. This cause a stir in the countryside, an her mother

worry bout her daughter bein hurt an so forth. But her daughter can't pay enough attention to one fella, enough to get hurt. Now she know somethin be missin. Oh, the teas an juleps an dancin an dinin, an the flutterin of fans an the twinklin of eyes be quite a bit of fun, but it leave her mind an her heart quite empty. Her child continue growin to be a fine an handsome young man an her sister continue growin to be a beautiful an talented young woman, an her stepfather continue growin to be moody, an her grandma continue growin to be gentle, an her mother continue growin to be a firm an intelligent manager a the good a the household. But she worry bout her daughter's behavior an her daughter worry a little bout it too, now, an she retreat to her room with her child or with her sister or with the negroe girl who growed with her since childhood. Always the brown girl, who now be a beautiful woman, make the woman think, specially a her own skin color. When the weather be warm with spring she retreat to the house behind her own an she hear the negroe music, an they treat her cordial but do not try to make her comfortable. Maybe this is why she find confort there. White people always fussin bout bein polite an makin her feel welcome an humblin themselves to her, just so she feel comfortable, but cuttin her eyes out behind her back. Here, behind her own house, black folks don't pretend to like her, an here behind her own house, respect be somethin that come from inside.

It be in such a mood in spring that they bring him. He be born in Alabama, but he run away when he was grown an now he be sent to her house for a debt. He send shivers through the grounds when he come. The woman watch alone from her window, his tallness an fairness be a strikin new feature on the landscape. He be angry, she can tell, by the way he stand. He be resigned, she can tell, by the way he talk. Proud too, she can tell by the straightness a his back an the uplift a his chin. He make her think, specially a her own color. He look around hissself but his eyes don't venture to her window. She resign herself to her vanity an begin to brush her hair. Her closest friend, the brown girl she growed with who now be a woman like herself, rush in, did you see him? Yes, I be watchin from the window. I hear yor mamma say maybe he can lift yor spirits, sez yes mam I can ride real good when she asks him. Oh, honey! I bet he could lift any

girl's spirit, an yor mamma's too! The white woman she smile an chuckle at this an then she wonder what it be like ridin with him. Funny. She never think a ridin with a color man before, though he be kinda fair an she think maybe he have white blood. . .hmph, only blood I ever see bleedin from black folks be red like mine. . . an she remember the last time ridin, with that fella come in from Carolina, she can't remember which one, which Carolina that is. He be charmin, think he suave, an he do be sweet, tryin to kiss her in the woods. She go cold, it bein like kissin a dishrag.

She watch the woman leaf through her dresses like they be pages out a dictionary. She want to tell her friend to take what she want, but she be afraid her friend might choose one a her own favorites, an she go back on her own word. She give her friend, instead a her choice, she give her friend a chiffon to throw over her dark shoulders. The dark woman know she deserve more an this, an she irritate her friend with this knowledge. Then, she take leave.

Alone now the light woman fuss in the mirror with her eyes. She look at her body. Was a time everything stay exactly in place. . . seem like only yesterday. She choose last year's puckered cotton from Atlanta, the one whose bodice lift her breasts in a way she like very much. She put a quick powder to her shoulders an then it be time. She see her grandma on the veranda with small glasses perched on her nose writin a letter or a lesson for the babies an she say hello dear, you look lovely, so cool, in that faraway voice that say I'm busy an preoccupied with somethin terribly important, I'm sure you understand. I've been looking for you, say mama, always botherin herself with chores on her mind. Mama be quite capable a carryin on both conversations, the one with herself an the one with her daughter, your sister wants to play for us tonight, a new piece her father brought in from the coast. Yes I been hearin her practicin an her mother almost remind her to place the G on the end of her words but realize it be quite too late for that. She wonder if the climate have made her daughter a bit lazy, well, what if it has. Her mother see to it that everyone in the family is sittin at the table when supper be served an see to it also that her husband, always eatin alone, is served his favorite a bacon an potatoes. Strange an sullen man, she talk a his drinkin a too much imported scotch, but

remember too that he be a good provider. Her mother grew all the way up in Baltimore Maryland an her crisper speech reflect such upbringing. The woman's younger sister an her boy child get a little silly with their peas and the woman remind them they are at dinner. She continue to grow tired a bein a disappointment to the children. She admire her sister's talent an discipline at the piano an she think how the children are a constant source a hope for herself.

II She notice his navel first, his neck, an his lips full an soft as peonies. He hate her. He hate what she stand for because she be what she stand for an she be standin here lookin him over as proper southern ladies do. . . proper my ass, I could. . . an he watch her with more scrutiny than she ever been watched with before. Is it new for a white woman to look at a man a color this way? She don't seem to think so. Do it be unusual for a black man to look at a white skin woman so bold like, bold enough to make her uncomfortable in her own clothes? He don't seem to think so. Then why if someone else enter the stable where they come upon each other so unexpectedly (even though they was expectant of one another) would they quick change expression an continue what it was they each be about to do? In other words, why'd they be actin like they been caught doin somethin when all they was doin was lookin? These questions don't pass their minds cause they don't yet know they was quite lookin at each other like that. His eyes startle her, he lookin at her so hard. She don't stop to think if it might be hatred or spite or cunning. She don't know what to think. She don't know it be curiosity, his way a figurin a puzzle, his way a solvin a problem, a tryin to see just as deep inside the people around hisself as possible. Funny. He never think a the white folks around hisself as people, why, he look into a horses eyes deeper an longer than he ever think a lookin into white folks eyes, just couldn't figure they have anythin very deep to look into. Funny feelin it give him to think this woman standin near him might be as human as hisself.

Now when their eyes meet you think they might try to soften their gaze a little, just to show one another there be nothin to fear, like you might do a child. But these two are not children an they don't soften the gaze till after their

eyes look away.

She choose the horses herself, the drapple grey an the chestnut. She choose an English saddle for herself to ride in, more fittin to her narrow frame. A western style be more suited to the big chestnut an the big chestnut be more fittin for her new man to ride. Man. Simple word. Funny how it slip through her thoughts without hardly any notice. Course the dapple not as fast an wild as the chestnut, she don't feel proper dressed for any fast ridin today, what with the full ridin suit she bring from New York, which on second thought she wonder if she shoulda wore. . .seein how warm the sun is today. . .an she look to her companion to state what her purpose be, her purpose bein ready to go. He look her up an down an he wonder how can she stand all them buttons an collars, then clicks the chestnut gentle with his heel.

There be a meadow beyond the fields, behind the woods, away from the houses. You ever been out on a boat an the boat feel like it comin out from under you? She think a the feelin an her chest swell like the water under the boat. The land is swellin under the horses hooves like that now. The edge of the trees brings about moist earth, moist cause they so close to the pond now, so when the chestnut an the dapple lean to drink, the riders' feet sink a little into the mud, the man first gettin down to help the lady from her dapple grey.

She watch him from the rock she like to sit on. He keep his distance from her an she watch kinda immodest when he remove his shirt an reveal his breasts an shoulders. He just assume she don't mind his takin half his clothes off like that cause when he see her watchin so intent he unbotton his pants, too. She turn her eyes away quick an now the swell in her chest move down a little to be between her hips. He say, you don't mind my takin my shirt off like that now do ya miss lady? An seein her modesty he just roll up the legs a his pants before wadin in. Course she won't be outdone by the boldness of a black man so she remove her hat an jacket an rolls up her sleeves. She sure like to take off her boots but she have so much trouble gettin em on an off an for some reason she don't want to ask this man to help her. She look again now an see how the water glistenin in his hair when the sun bounce through the trees. He feel the pant legs

draggin in the water an the coolness drift about his groin an when it reach his belly button he get goosebumps. She feel swellin now all over herself.

She lay awake that night thinkin bout the funny feelin she get an lettin herself feel it all over again. He lay awake that night thinkin about the woman and babies he had to leave behind.

For the next day an the next an the next the woman keep busy with her work, the little ones occupyin her time what with teachin em how to read an she find herself enjoyin the work she used to think was silly, her not seein the point in teachin folks how to read when they can't afford books. Now all the children be givin her hope. Her family's library be so vast when she ain't workin with the babies she look things up from the past an try to put it together with the present. A fella bring her a present that week, the fella that be tryin to kiss her in the woods. He bring her a wee small kitten with eyes the color a sapphire, the color a her own eyes, say she come all the way the other side a the world from a place called Siam. An she look Siam up in the library an the kitten play all around the book sittin on the page she want to read an bitin the lady's fingers. She know what to name it, she hear a negroe sing one day about a 'gem of a woman' an the kitten do be a gem.

An the man be busy with his work, too, his work bein a blacksmith an makin things, too, people always say if he been born white he be a famous 'inventor.' But his favorite times when he can be helpin folks, his folks, he hate helpin white folks, he feel like they be stealin from him like they be takin pieces outa him like the flies be doin on the meat hangin in the smokehouse. An they don't appreciate nothin, don't even know to say thankya, lessin it's to each other then they get all them high timin airs about em an flutter about like butterflies caught in a jar. Remember one day he saw his babies caught a butterfly an have it all wrapped up in a old handkerchief an he make em let it go an his woman get all mad say her babies never got a chance to keep anything for theirselves an he say I can't stand to see nothin alive be kept against its own will, an she understand then.

In a week the woman be goin with her grandma to Charleston for the annual ball. Fore then, the day before,

she go ridin again, this time she don't dress so fancy an she take a fast horse, an so does the man. She can see the man know how to ride, she ain't so sure a her own ability but she love to ride reckless. She never ride this black horse before but she willin to gamble, specially as everyone who see her get on say no miss you can't ride that wild colt he gonna throw ya down for sure! The man see her get on an he watch the fuss folks be makin, but he jus watch an don't say nothin, he wanna see can she really ride. An she don't know jus how well she can ride til she ride that dark colt over the hills an meadows that day an she get a little scared when they start to jumpin over creeks an crevices, but she love to be scared. An the man look from the side of his eye, he see from the top a that chestnut that she have a funny look on her face. When the horses come to a stop, he say, what's the matter? She pull herself together real quick an say nothin the matter an then she decide to confide in this man an she say, I get scared sometimes but it ain't nothin to worry ya, I love to get scared. An this time he get the swellin between his hips.

An the next day she do go to Charleston with her grandma, an everyone look so grande an all the people be showin off their new rings an talkin bout their trips to Europe, an their trips to New York an Boston an there's a duke come all the way from England an a baroness now residin in New York an her grandma introduce her to all the best young men, but the woman don't find them to her likin. They be showin off. . .Ah heah how them nigras been treatin y'all white folks up north ha ha, ah heah them abolitionists talkin bout comin down heah an. . .well . . .well don't you go talkin about folks like that. . .an the girls titter an chitter an some people look downright embarrassed. The woman say nothin. She ask a lady standin next to her if she be readin any books by that new author from Paris an the lady say yes she did an that's the way the woman generally ignore what she don't like.

One thing she like is a ring, an amber ring, polished smooth as a brown eye. She buy this ring an have it wrapped in brown velvet to take home with her an she go home the next day with her grandma at her side. An her grandma have new books to bring back to everyone in the family an precious little gifts, too, for everyone. But the

woman she jus buy the ring an she keep it a secret, close to her. The journey back ain't filled with excitement like the trip goin but it ain't without anticipation the woman travels. An the man is told to meet the woman an her grandma an he go, not because he want to, but this is what he have to do. An he see them comin down the road toward him an he find hisself lookin very close, squintin his eyes to see what she look like comin to him like that. When she get there an he see her, she smile to him an he jus say, hey.

She don't think too much about the ring she be hidin close to her, if she think about it alot she won't know what to do.

- III When she start to notice her feelins be real, she realize her troubles ain't over yet. The turmoil become like a violent storm that tosses the feelins between them an allow them little time for rest. Then she pull in her lips cause she might spill it all an he tease her in his way till her lips melt into a smile. Only this time she don't smile so hard cause now she want to tell him true, how she feel. An he don't exactly try to stop her, but he almost be afraid to know, who know what it might lead to, stead he let his hand brush over her back, an she be happy for that day.

She be distracted. She be carryin torment about in her head, should I be takin this chance? Should I be takin that chance? She be confused like this all the time now. And the man, he be wonderin too, just how far can he go.

Do my own fire be so strong I can see it shinin so from your eyes? Do you be just a mirror for my sins? Maybe that darkness be just the deep I'm goin to drown in. If it be so, if it be just a ocean I won't hesitate to surrender my last breath of air, just so the darkness comfort me. When she say this to herself, she turn around to make sure nobody be listenin, an she wonder can he hear. But the man don't be takin foolish chances, nothin so stupid as to give his heart away. But he have the desire, that desire be eatin at that heart an he say no, it ain't so, but he know it to be true.

She growin tired a this game a charades. It be excitin to her to try an hide what she have, but what the use, she be slippin out here an there in spite a herself. It seem the harder she try pretendin, the more it show. An he try pretendin, too, that he don't notice, but he know what be

goin on in his own mind. It be like a itch he can't scratch. Ain't much scratchin she can do without usin her hands.

She wonder, do he know? An he say, I know, without ever sayin a word. Then, for a minute, they can rest.

The rest don't last long. Their minds be cookin an their thoughts be stirrin the brew. She be makin his blood boil, an he, bein older an wiser, say it's time to turn it off. She can't really be believin this man don't want her. When she hear this comin from his own lips, she step her foot down hard, an this way she let off steam. She be so mad, she feel like just a ingredient, like the spice he be addin to make the dish more tasty. So she put herself back on the shelf an look at him like he a fool. She don't know what he think a this cause she close her mind to him. She won't even admit to herself, now, that she love him.

He feel free again, like a person feel when a hex been lifted from his soul. Like a person feel when he wake from a bad dream. Like a person feel who been free from addiction. He don't stop to think, now, that he love her.

They go about the business a livin. They act like there never been nothin between them. The need ain't died, but it have been buried deeper. When it show, an it can't help but show when they go to one another's eyes, it show that much deeper. The swellin go deeper, too, it be turnin inside out inside their stomachs cause now they know, they be lonely.

There be such a thing called pride, but the woman just refuse to swallow it. An there too be a thing as appetite, but the man fear to bite off more than he can chew. They don't know just how hungry they be. But they each have they own ways a pleasin they taste buds, an satisfyin the achin in their bellies.

She call it amusement.

He call it fun.

But when the fun be over, the bellyache return. Then he turn his attention to her. This time, he think. He think a her as hard as he can, an as long as he like, an he satisfy hisself, in a way. Though she be outside a his reach, he know her now, an he know her again an nothin can stop him from thinkin he like to know her for real.

An she be waitin for him, like she did from the start, she be out in the sky, shimmerin glimmerin, waitin for him an this time when she smile, it be like a thousand stars shinin

just for him.

The mind be a funny game. He wonder do she know they just been together an when he open his eyes the swellin be more like a cloud burst that rain in his head. He have no way to ask her an he feel small an sad in the face a this knowledge.

She know she can be a comfort to him. She feel she have that kind a power. She think she be what he need to make his juices flow. She be too afraid to ask. She feel helpless when she look at things in that light.

It like bein that much further away from heaven. They be so close but so distant from each other's touch. They be in spirit, one. In body, they be strangers.

Now she be turnin her attention away real hard, like from a spell that need be broken. He be sent away for awhile, away from the house which make it easier for her not to think a him. An his mind pass over her once in awhile, but he won't allow hisself the luxury of a dream. Each one in their own way be pretendin to theirselves that this thing don't matter. Pretendin like they don't really want to be in one another's arms. They say it's over. Each one, in their own way say, it's finished. It never had no place to grow. No room to breathe. An each of them gets sad to think this thing have to die. Why can't they be happy in their discovery of each other? Why can't they fondle their favorite dreams in such a way to make them real? But they don't ask theirselves why. No, they just goin to sit back an watch their dream collapse til it be just a pile of rubble in their hearts. That don't bother these two adults too much. Their feelings been hurt before, an they have watched most all their dreams come an go like the minutes on a clock. This time, though, they sure would like to capture a moment with each other. Just one naked moment away from the pryin eyes a the world an the watchful gaze a their own conscience.

They get a moment together, when he return. They be friendly, friendly as they can with other folks around. They stand close, close as they can without havin to admit to theirselves how close they would like it.

The woman, she must talk to her friend now. Her friend is the only one can help her when she have need. An her friend understand everything. An her friend don't misunderstand the woman's careless mind. An the woman

know by seein in her friend's eyes, that her friend be aware a all her silliness. An the dark woman admit to some silliness a her own. Then the two women laugh together, an the laughin be a comfort like cool water on hot skin. They feel more certain of theirselves by the time they say goodnight.

The dark woman have her babies to tend to an their needs be the most important in the world. She stumble a little on the stones as she make her way through the cool evenin breeze. It be gettin dark a little earlier now an the mockinbird gone from his roost in the trees. Only light be comin from the stars. This be her darkest hour. Walkin away from everything she don't have, everything she know she have a right to. Her babies, she know will make everything all right. They be more than money, or pale skin, can buy.

She find the man sittin by the pantry when she come in. It been a long while since she have seen him, an just now, seein his face lookin warm like that, she realize she miss him, too, while he was gone. She always have avoid of him, she always have a fear a large dark men, always rememberin the temper her own father have toward her when she be little, an her father lookin so big. But now she see his face for real an she see what she love in her father all those years, an she see she love it in this man too. She remember what the white woman tell her a her feelins for this man. How the white woman goin crazy for want a havin this man. She remember all their years together an all the secrets they have shared since they was little girls together. An she get a funny feelin, like a hesitation in her mind, an she get another feelin, like a pullin in her stomach. An now the man be standin close to her, all warm an large, an the pullin get stronger when he reach his arms around her back an when they kiss it be like the sun come out around them.

January 25, 1973

Barbara Alfano

Brush away the strands of hair from my face
so i may look upon the game
of fox and rabbit;

the Winner to choose
Their destiny
Through a clever
deception, or,
perhaps a long-awaited
revelation

The view from here is of imminent
confusion,
anticipating reward

Fox's tease
veils your dreams,
Leaving you breathless
Rabbit's mindfulness
exposes my nakedness,
Leaving me abandoned
To what end shall we progress
— no matter —
for neither of us shall be victor —

Barbara Alfano 1972

Gentle winds
of sleepy evening
To you i ask a chance:
of loving once
the true colors
of your rainbow
and
my baby
born at dusk
realizing the climb
and
reaching
the love before her.





IT HAD HAPPENED JUST THIS WAY SEVERAL TIMES BEFORE. Charlotte's wailing into the night. Desiree lying still and quiet in her child's fear knowing what to expect. She watched the designs of Charlotte's life; colors and patterns weaving, building, creating texture and depth. Her life was a huge tapestry. The individual strands bright and strong but dependent upon the others.

In the morning Charlotte came to Desiree's bedside, face swollen, and a touch of make-up to hide the pain.

"Desiree, it's time to get up. You'll be late for school."

"Not today, Lottie. I'll stay home with you."

"No Babe, I don't want you to miss anymore school. Come on, get up."

"Lottie, what happened last night? I know how it started, but I want to know why?"

"Babe, it's the same old story. Perhaps, it's my curse. I don't know. I can't seem to make it work. This thing called love has a strange way of switching coats on me. For awhile it was sweet and good. It seemed right for all of us. I hoped it would stay that way. But now. . .things change, people change. . ."

"Lottie, don't give up now. Maybe things will get better. Everybody has hard times. Try talking to him. Make him see what is happening."

"I have tried, and you see what happened. It's impossible for me to go on after last night. I need a change and a rest. . .time to get it together. . .to start again in a new direction. I want so much for the both of us. Is that wrong?"

"No, it's not wrong. But is it possible? Anyway, I understand."

"Babe, it's bad now and it can't get much worst. There is no harm in reaching. We could visit Pearl and I could. . ."

"Lottie, can't it wait? Can't we wait? At least until summer?"

"Now you wait! We could take a plane trip. You know how much you love to fly."

"I don't want to leave."

"Desiree, I've decided and I am set to go. We are leaving tonight. Now go to school and say goodbye to your friends."

When school was over, Desiree raced home and flung open the door. The house was, as usual spotless, but now it was awkwardly quiet and too clean. Charlotte was wearing her

orange knit dress. It brought out her fire. She looked good in it.

“Desiree, hurry and pack your things. The plane leaves in two hours. We don't want to miss it.”

Desiree minimized her possessions to the essentials. A few dresses, a sweater, some underwear, and the China doll. She chose the doll just because it was the only thing she could remember always having. Actually, it was ugly with its hard ceramic flesh and fishy glass eyes. She wrapped the doll and cushioned it in the satchel.

“Lottie, I'm ready to leave.”

“Be with you in a minute. I'm almost finished with this letter. I'll make it short and sweet.”

She wrote in red ink with fluid, graceful letters. When she had finished, she sealed it in an envelope, labeled it, and propped it against the vase of flowers on the table.

Pearl opened the door. Her heavy body hung unevenly under a threadbare gown. She half smiled at Charlotte and Desiree.

“I don't know why some people don't plan their trips better. It's not right to get folks out of bed this hour of the night. Should try to arrive during the day at a respectable hour.”

“I'm sorry Pearl. There was no other way. Do you have two rooms we could let for awhile?”

“Honey, I'm all filled up right now. I have a room for you, but I'll have to put the child on a cot in the kitchen.”

Within a week Desiree became the new girl in school. She lost herself in studying and making new friends. School was, at best, an amusing diversion. Charlotte eventually found a job and met Claude. They both worked the night shift at a private club carrying trays and bidding for tips. When necessary, they made ends meet on the side, doing whatever came naturally.

Desiree's first love was a tall, brown man named Earl. He was the most perfect creature she had ever seen. Even finer than Claude. There was so much to explore and savor.

Many evenings were spent upon Charlotte's huge bed watching television, and experimenting with this newness. When the pretense no longer satisfied Earl, he became passionately hard and rough with Desiree. It was all too fast,

and she wasn't quite sure about anything, until she lay drenched in his sweat, in the glow of the television.

In the bathroom, she looked in the mirror and at herself. She seemed the same.

When Charlotte returned from work that night, she found Desiree quiet and distant.

"What's happening with you, Babe?"

"Lottie, Earl made love to me. I feel disappointed now. I am not sure if I wanted it. . .the way it happened."

Charlotte held Desiree close in her arms and moaned as she rocked her back and forth.

"The important events of your life will rarely be perfect, unless you exercise control over them. It was up to you to determine when and how you wanted Earl to love you. If you choose to give yourself away, you may well be disappointed. That disappointment, in time, will pass. But it doesn't have to be that way. It can be different."

One of Charlotte's friends, Mr. Roland, visited every Wednesday. His presence was of no importance until a particular afternoon when Desiree was asked to join them. They sat around the kitchen table drinking Scotch and playing cards. Charlotte occasionally chuckled at his coy remarks. Desiree listened as he paid compliments to her slender hands and perfect white teeth. She saw herself standing on the outside looking in. Watching the dance, anticipating its final steps. She was relieved when Roland finally left.

"Lottie, I've always liked Mr. Roland. He seems nice and he's fun to be with. But, he has never had much to say to me. Today he was so attentive. What does he want?"

"He is fascinated with you. Also, he is a very generous man."

"I know that. Get to the point."

"He's interested in meeting you next Wednesday. I won't be here. You make sure Earl isn't either."

That week passed slowly for Desiree. Earl was no problem. He had lost his magic and Desiree was beyond his reach. Her date with Roland was just what she expected.

When Charlotte returned from work, she whispered Desiree awake.

"How was your date? Did everything go alright?"

“Yes, I’ll see him again next week.”

“Good. . . go back to sleep. . . pleasant dreams. . .”

Desiree rolled in her sleep. Charlotte stroked her hair and kissed her face until she faded back into sleep.

All the boarders in Pearl’s house were required to attend her church. Sunday was the day to dress and socialize. Pearl, a self-ordained minister, spoke in tongues and had healed the woman on the third floor of arthritis. Desiree was a member of the choir and sometimes sang duets with Roland. After services, half the congregation gathered in Pearl’s dining room. The Sisters, all in white, came with candied yams, bacon and greens, glazed ham, baked beans, fried chicken, and pies. Roland brought little gold things and colorful stones for Desiree. Everyone noticed his attention, but no one questioned his intentions. No one, except Pearl.

During the night, she crept into the kitchen and laid her hands on Desiree’s head. Swaying and muttering in the darkness, she chanted, “Get out you Devil. . . I know you’re in there. You can’t hide from me. Get out! Get out! We don’t want your kind ’round. Be gone, I say, be gone. . . and leave this girl alone. Be healed, my child, be healed. . . Lord have mercy on her soul. Have mercy Lord. . . have mercy!”

Charlotte’s pattern had once again completed its cycle. She had designed and colored another portion of the tapestry and was ready to start anew. Her days were not so bright, her timing a little off, and her spirit not as free.

“Desiree, it is possible that Claude and I may not be working at the club much longer. Business is slow and the tips are lousy. I’m considering going to New York and looking for work there.”

“Lottie, I’m not going with you this time. There is no reason for me to leave.”

“Do you know what you’re saying?”

“I am telling you that I love you and I know that if you must leave, you will. But I am just beginning to live my life in a way that is comfortable and meaningful to me.”

“How will you live?”

“I’ll stay with Roland. He has a room for me in his house.”

“Do you fully realize what you’re saying?”

“Lottie. I knew this time would come. I’ve given it a lot of thought and I’ve made my decision. When are you leaving?”

“As soon as possible. . .in the morning.”

“I’ll call Roland and have him pick me up tonight. I don’t think I could bear to see you leave. I’ll miss you.”

Roland unlocked the door to Desiree’s room. It was enormous and papered in bouquets of tiny violets. The ceiling was painted with billowing clouds against a mauve sky. There were four windows and French doors leading to an ell-shaped sunporch, abundant with greenery. The center of the room was occupied by an ornate brass bed, covered with a deep purple, velvet spread. Lush pink and silver pillows were strewn on top, and on the floor at the foot of the bed. In the far corner stood a massive oak dresser with brass handles and knobs. Above it, extending to the ceiling hung a mirror which reflected the entire room, and the plants on the porch beyond the windows. Two floor lamps with Tiffany shades were placed to either sides of the dresser.

Desiree unpacked the satchel. She hung the dresses in the closet. Her jewelry and bottles of delicate perfumes and lotions, were neatly arranged on the dresser. She could hear the faint sounds of music and finger popping, the laughter of men, drinking and playing cards in the front rooms. At times, there was a low groan or a thumping from upstairs. The din of women at work. The satchel was empty, except for the China doll. She gently removed it from the case to find an envelope with her name in red ink. She caressed it for a moment and placed it, unopened, in the drawer. She positioned the China doll high on the pillows of the bed. Her head tilted slightly to one side, hands in lap, with one booted foot dangling precociously over the edge.

Barbara A. Valianti

Stilts -- I can walk on them
for so long
And I can fall off of them
and get back up
before someone will notice.

My clothes hide the wood.
The bare, unfinished wood.

Up, still higher
I paint my face
a carnival
I stop my soul
I bite my skin
I raise white knuckles
to my head.

17 sticks of wood bound together by a piece of shredded rag, leaned against a garbage can.

The wood varied in length, width, and form.

A little boy walking by suddenly focused his attention upon the pile of “discarded material.”

The reaction on the youngster’s face created an illusion that something was about to happen.

A piece of shredded rag leaned against a garbage can.

General Cigar Co.

Celeste Aliberti

I can taste the staleness
lingering in my mouth
like yesterday's greasy potatoes

My little niece was christened
over eggplant parmigiana
and stuffed mushrooms
White baby
in your lily white dress
you have no idea of staleness
and of the rancid holes that men
make in lily white babies
like you

I want to preserve your freshness
your rose petal cheeks
your kicking feet
I want to protect you from the holes
that men make —

And Christen You Safe.

My name is Georges. I live in this serene little apartment that overlooks the stink weeds of nature, that climb six feet high, and overshadow my beloved plastic encased broken windows. What pleasures that have come to me in this place. This room of mine, is filled with wonders of unknown origins, they just belong here. They are trophies for the many conquests of my past. I have and for that matter still build my life on the fact that I fuck at will. I have a list of lovers as long as I have time to tell about them. I have always been favored with the wildest sexual drive ever imaginable. I am a lover. A very good one at that. My relatives have always tried to change me, but they have failed. I am envied for the gifts that people bestow on me. My faraway sister once declared that "When I die I want to come back as Georges." I might also add that my sister is a very wealthy woman, while I am poor, crass and not the least bit interested in her other than the possibility that she will die and leave me all her money. I have dabbled in the idea of letting her live my life in an even exchange for her money. I wonder! I can just imagine her all decked out in my two piece denim suit of light blue with a navy beret tilted to the left. A pair of blue fry boots and a leather satchel. Her long hair blowing over her pea coat. Chasing the women all over town planning her next fuck with accurate detail. I wonder whom she would choose as her first conquest? While I on the other side could be deliriously happy counting all my money and touring the world. I might even follow her for sloppy seconds knowing myself that the women I meet are usually the best to be had. Of course, there have been a few exceptions. Of course, etc. —

Yesterday was a very profitable day. I made love with the elevator operator in between the second and third floor of the Medical arts building. I was on my way to the dentist. A very good friend of mine. You must see the lights flashing as people rang for the elevator. The commotion all around us as we so happily fucked away on the little stool that is placed in the middle of the elevator for our purposes. When all was done we were gratefully rescued from our ten minutes of terror in a broken elevator by the repair crew. I have a strange feeling that someone must have known because both of us had the most delicious look on our faces. Another story for my diary. Sure to fill up a few lines. Next

I was in the reclining chair that my dentist so conveniently has. Not only do they call it the purple room but they cater to your every whim. To your right you can feel the dentist and to the left a breast is usually pressed in your face while the lovely assistant helps you remove your spit into a suction tube. A very modern office. Another ten minute orgy and I'm off to school. I decided to walk down the stairs this time. It just wouldn't be right to tie up the elevator twice in the same day. On the way to school just a few short blocks I could feel the eyes of every woman I came in contact with staring at my proud possession. It sent chills through my body just thinking about all those beautiful women. It really is amazing that when I see a woman I immediately begin to think of the most wonderful things, for instance, marshmallows. Marshmallows! So soft and they melt right into your mouth after a few tender bites. Fluffy, I can't forget fluffy. Marshmallows are fluffy, and soft and they melt in your mouth after a few tender bites. Loving is without doubt one of the finest things in this world. Who can blame me?

My thoughts of sex are an act of art. Some people paint, others write prose and poems, some people act. But I have the art of sex in my power. The museum of Natural Sex Special exhibit by GEORGES. I really wonder if my sister knows what she's getting herself into? At school it was the usual. Not too much action for a person of my high artistic capabilities. Just a few havenots hoping they might be the lucky one today. Not a chance. I, Georges have an appointment with Sophia Loren. Her wild Italian eyes light up the world when she sees me. Can I blame her? She knows what's in store for her. I am escorted into her waiting room and the smell of roses overpowers me. She always has roses for me. The smell of a rose for me is like the smell of a woman and it always heightens my sexual desire. But what is this? I suddenly find myself transposed from Manhattan into the woods of New Jersey in my sister's home. Oh god! Not now! I was just about to hold my lovely Sophia in my arms. My sister, my sister. She has taken over my body and is now tenderly wrapping herself around my wild Italian beauty. I must find a way back, if at all possible. I can't take the pressure of frustration all around me, how can this actually be? Me, Georges, in this charming little home in New Jersey

while my creepy little sister is enjoying the favors of my Sophia. The sweat rolling into my eyes I jump up from bed startled. Not quite sure what has happened to me but knowing for sure it wasn't a dream.

The telephone, answer the telephone Georges. "Hello" "Hi Arlene" "Were you sleeping Georges?"

"No, not really. I guess I was just lying here in bed, daydreaming I think? I'm not quite sure of what I was doing."

"You really sound as if you're all fucked up. You weren't fooling around with anything were you?"

"No I was just thinking crazy thoughts I guess, listen Arl let me call you back I want to go to the bathroom and then get a cup of coffee. O.K.?"

"Yeah all right, just call me back. I want to talk to you. "I will I promise."

Still not quite sure of what actually happened to me I find my way to the stove to brew some Turkish coffee (when Arthur the cat pops up and I decide to throw him a little fuck) I'm not quite sure if I should call Arlene back. I just can't take all those little problems that have such a diverse affect on her life. What the fuck. "Hello Arlene."

"Hi. Georges. I'm so glad you called back. Listen I just don't know who to tell but I've been having these dreams lately and I'm just a little bit curious."

"Well, what have you been dreaming about? I'm sure it's a good one coming from you."

"No, listen, this is serious. I've been dreaming that I am making love to a woman, and I'm enjoying it too. It's just that it scares me and I know that you would be the only one to understand."

"Me? What do I know? Listen it's nothing to worry about every one dreams of making love to someone of their own sex eventually. Why don't you try it?"

"Be serious Georges."

"I am being serious. Listen Arlene. If you're dreaming of women why not be with one. I'm always dreaming of women and I follow through. Just do what comes natural to you."

"Sure it's all so easy for you to say, you're single and don't have any responsibilities. Look at me, there's Michael and Eric."

“Listen Arlene why don’t you just forget it. If you’re really worried go fuck Michael and all will be well again. Listen I really must go I’m expected at my mother’s for Thanksgiving dinner and I’m not dressed yet. Bye. I’ll call you in a few days.”

“Bye Georges.”

“Bye.”

One of the few drawbacks of being a sex freak. Everyone wants personal attention. Maybe I should take her out of her misery? How am I ever going to face my sister. Just the mention of it scares me to no end. I know she took my place. But what I don’t know is what exactly happened while she was there. Did she make love to Sophia Loren or did Sophia Loren make love to her. Either way I’m sure it was quite amusing. I can just see old miss proper moaning under the sweet caresses of Sophia. Wildly passionate and then screaming her delight when she comes. Ha!

The big bird is placed in the middle of the table and everyone is licking their lips in tender anticipation of getting that white meat into their mouths. (I decide that to eat the bird is 100% better then fucking it.) And the holidays. They are the most sensual of all. It’s a roman orgy. All this food in one place at the same time. It is a Roman orgy, aren’t we all Italians, and isn’t that my sister who wants to be me sitting across the room from me so tenderly eating her turkey like it was her last supper. She hasn’t said a word and her face gives me no clues. We don’t say much but I feel like telling my other brothers and sisters what happened. Who would believe it except for her and I. No, that’s not the way. The one thing that does bother me though is what if every time I’m about to make love she takes over my body? It’s not possible. This couldn’t happen to me. I’ve built my life around the conquest of lovers, and now to have it taken away from me just because she wants to be me. It’s really not fair after all I really can’t spend her money while she runs around with my women.

“Your favorite nuts, Georges?”

“Thanks, how about some more wine and an apple would go just fine. Would anyone like to share my apple? How about you Sister dear, care for some of my apple?”

“No thanks but I will have some nuts.”

“Not them, those are special just for Georges,” chimes in

my sister Rosemary.

“Pardon me, I should have known.”

“Listen Sister dear there’s a hundred things to eat. Why do you want mine? Why not a piece of apple pie, or maybe pumpkin? There’s cheese, and other nuts, here have a walnut, but you can’t have my filberts and besides there are only a few.”

I’m sure I got the point across. She doesn’t reply, just gets up and goes into the other room. Probably mumbling to herself. What a selfish egotist I am. I shouldn’t be so hard on her. It must have been a real shocker for her also.

I dream of her money. A house of my own with a brown Mercedes Benz parked in the driveway. A stereo system that is possible to play throughout and a host of servants to serve and cater to my every whim. I could spend days dreaming of the things I could do with her money. Her money! Well damit it should be mine, if she takes over my body and fucks my women I deserve some. I still can’t understand how she is able to do it (take over my body that is). I wonder truly if she would take over (I’m fucking my pillow) if I was fucking an adominable snowman?

See I’m rather unique for all the great lovers of the past were endowed with great fortunes while I on the other hand am not. Yet my conquests of love will become a legend in my own time. I’m sure among all the women and things I have fucked at least two out of five know each other and thereby cause a delightful little tale amongst each other.

Too stuffed from my mother’s Italian orgy I decided to visit my favorite little bar for some jazz and cocktails. My sister was leaving for New Jersey and I sincerely hoped she would stay there and leave me alone. Once inside the bar with a drink or two the red lights and some smutty conversations (the bar stool all wet) I became horny and looking around I spotted this charming little sixteen year old who has been dying to get into my pants. I decided it was now or never. I left my usual crowd and ventured over to the child. With wild eyes and panting breath I began to converse with this young thing. Since everyone else was too busy talking I gently slid my hands up the child’s legs and began roaming. To my surprise I fell in love instantly. I did have a doubt or two on whether I should go to bed with a sixteen year old or not. But in the end I realized that “what

the fuck a fuck is a fuck.” After a few drinks and foreplay we were both quite restless and decided we should head towards the “John” where we both could relieve ourselves. Young love, how beautiful. I had completely forgotten about my sister. Would she take over now, knowing that I decided to share my love with this tender young thing? No, she has abandoned me.

I now hesitate in my belief that maybe it was all a dream and that my dear sister never took over my body but my obsession for the money drove me to delusions.

I can only resolve that if she indeed had taken over my body I would have had her money. I did not and still do not. So therefore it never really did happen. If at all anything has ever happened to me is now becoming questionable. My past that I have recorded, is that real? Am I truly the great lover of the 70's that I so profusely claim to be? Are there women screaming for my body? And my darling sister who I have held in suspect for so long. Envious of her money and life style what do I feel now?

With a heavy heart I left the bar and wandered home. Fortunately for me the sixteen year old trailed behind to spend the evening. It was delightful. Young meat is quite tasty. The other day I received an anonymous letter that contained \$1,000.00. The letter read as follows:

Dear Georges,

Enclosed please find the sum of \$1,000.00 for services rendered.

Barbara A. Valianti

Stepping light walking slow
Grimacing wide big white teeth
Then smiles soft grabs the meat.

Grizzly bear incognito
He tip toes moves slow
Claws out mouth wide
Pulls you eats you
Slaps you you're dead.

Rolls you over with his paw
Rolls you over turns you over
Kicks you over
and chews you
just once more.

Linda Brennan

Dreams are like floating
leaves in gusty winds.
I wonder what path
each leaf follows.
If I was a fantasy,
I'd fly around in total
oblivion.
I'd smile and laugh. . .
I'd torment and kill. . .
I'm a nightmare.

Nightmare for a Dead Daughter

Lynda Blum

Screaming
from the window

Screaming Amy
from the window

The bus
Amy
The bus

her Mother's Day card
in her hand

The Cemetery Lady
scrubs Amy with
ammonia

liquid drops become
White Dwarfs
and we are burning

counterfeit images.

