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Editor and Publisher Katherine McNamara <editor@archipelago.org>

Contributing Editors
K. Callaway <kathyjcallaway@apexmail.com>
John Casey <anitraps@aol.com>
Benjamin Cheever <benjami200@aol.com>
Edith Grossman
Katharine Meyer <kathmeyer9265@aol.com>
Odile Hellier <VILLAGEVOICE@wanadoo.fr>

Production design and formatting
Debra Weiss <drwdesign@earthlink.net>

Editorial Staff
Steven Rubin, Caroline James

Letters to the Editor are welcomed, by post or via the Internet.
ARCHIPELAGO
Box 2485
Charlottesville, Va. 22902-2485 USA
E-mail: editor@archipelago.org

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Contributors

Sheila Fischman <fischman@aei.ca> was born in Saskatchewan and educated in Toronto; she now resides in Quebec. A co-founder of *Ellipse: Writers in Translation/Oeuvres en traduction* and a founding member of the Literary Translators' Association of Canada, she has also been a columnist for the Toronto *Globe & Mail* and the *Montreal Gazette* and a broadcaster with CBC Radio. She has translated more than one hundred works, principally novels, from French to English, by such contemporary Quebec writers as Yves Beauchemin, Lise Bissonette, Marie-Claire Blais, Roch Carrier, François Gravel, Anne Hébert, and numerous others. Twice she has won the Canada Council Translation Prize, and many times has been a finalist for the Governor General's Translation Prize. She has twice won the Félix-Antoine Savard Prize (Translation Center, Columbia University), and in 1998 was awarded the Governor General's Literary Award for Translation. She holds two honorary doctorates and is a member of the Order of Canada.

Benjamin Gantcher <bgantcher@yahoo.com> lives in New York City.

Susan Garrett <gpg@virginia.edu> is at work on a history of and memoir about photographers in the early 20th century, from which "Quick-Eyed Love" is adapted. She is the author of TAKING CARE OF OUR OWN: A Year in the Life of a Small Hospital (Dutton) and MILES TO GO: Aging in Rural Virginia (University Press of Virginia). Her essay "On Lucy Gray's Photography" appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 4, No. 1.

Kevin J. Kinsella <KJK@email.fdncenter.org> is a poet and translator living in Brooklyn, New York. He received the B.A. in Comparative Literature from the New School for Social Research and the M.A. in English from the University of Massachusetts in Boston. He recently completed a translation of Osip Mandelshtam's TRISTIA. Most recently, his translations and poetry have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Drunken Boat* <http://www.thedrunkenboat.com>, *3rd Bed*, and *Cavalcade*.

Gretchen McCullough <gretchen@aucegypt.edu> was raised in Harlingen, Texas. After graduating from Brown University in 1984, she taught in Egypt, Turkey, and Japan. She earned her M.F.A from the University of Alabama in 1995, and was awarded a Fulbright Lectureship to Syria for 1997-99. Excerpts of her novel, THE CLEOPATRA SCHOOL, have been published in *The Texas Review* and *Alaska Quarterly Review*. A radio essay about her experiences in Syria was aired in April 2000 on "All Things Considered." She teaches at the American University in Cairo. Her essay "Syria: Living in Wild and Marvelous Stories," appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 5, No. 1.

Osip E. Mandelshtam was born in Warsaw in 1891 but brought up in St. Petersburg. He studied at Heidelberg University and the University of St. Petersburg. The first volume of his poetry, STONE, appeared in 1913 and was followed by TRISTIA (1922) and POEMS (1928). After writing a bitter epigram about Stalin, he was exiled to the Urals where he attempted suicide. In 1937 he was freed to return to Moscow with his wife, but in May 1938 he was rearrested and sentenced to five years' hard labor. His heart was bad and it is likely that he was suffering from a severe nervous breakdown. He died, probably on December 27, 1938, in obscure circumstances en route to the Vladivostok labor camp.

Gaétan Soucy (b. 1958) has written three novels. The first two, *L'Immaculée conception* (1994, THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION) and *L'Acquittement* (1997, ATONEMENT) were considered "extraordinary, dark and baroque, and not the least because of their language." *L'Acquittement* won le Grand Prix du livre de Montréal in 1998. The third, *La Petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes* (2000, THE LITTLE GIRL WHO WAS TOO FOND OF MATCHES) has been translated into at least ten languages, including Spanish and Chinese, and is said to be the first Canadian novel ever to be nominated for the Prix Renaudot, France. "The narrator of the novel is a little boy who only knows of the world from books, such as the memoirs of Saint-Simon and the ethics of Spinoza. It is magic-realistic story of two brothers who have lived in isolation and suddenly have to confront the outside world when their father commits suicide." He teaches philosophy in Montréal.

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News of Our Contributors

George Quasha <gquasha@stationhill.org>, poet and publisher of Station Hill Press, has notified us of the death of **Spencer Holst** (1926-2001), whose story "The Zebra Storyteller" appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 3, No. 1. We join George Quasha in his sadness for the loss of this remarkable writer and man. His remembrance of Spencer Holst appears in Letters to the Editor.

Gabriele Leidloff <http://www.franklinfurnace.org/tfotp01/leidloff/leidloff.html>, whose radiograph of the life mask of Goethe appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 2, No. 3, presents her video work as artist in residence at the Franklin Furnace, New York City, in its series *The Future of the Present* 2001. "Gabriele Leidloff initiated the forum *l o g - i n / l o c k e d o u t* as an artistic production. *l o g - i n / l o c k e d o u t* invites artists, neuroscientists, and entrepreneurs into a dialogue. This dialogue manifests itself through exhibitions, debates, and salons creating a series of events for participants and their artistic and scientific work."

Maria Negroni, whose poems have appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 1, and Vol. 2, No. 4, has won the The Octavio Paz Fellowship for Poetry 2001-2002. A dual-language volume of ISLANDIA, translated by Anne Twitty, was published recently by Station Hill Press <http://www.stationhill.org>. More information about the Octavio Paz Fellowship for Poetry is available on the internet at the site of the Fundacion Octavio Paz <http://www.fundacionpaz.org.mx/>.

Eleanor Ross Taylor, a selection of whose poems appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 3, No. 1, is the subject of THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER, Essays on the Poetry of Eleanor Ross Taylor, edited by Jean Valentine, just published by Hobart and William Smith College Press <http://www.hws.edu/sensecareview>. Eleanor Ross Taylor is the

author of five volumes of poems: WILDERNESS OF LADIES (1960); WELCOME EUMENIDES (1972); NEW AND SELECTED POEMS (1983); DAYS GOING / DAYS COMING BACK (1992); and LATE LEISURE (1999), from which the *Archipelago* selection came. Writers contributing to this volume of "bright hommage" include Betty Adcock, Fred Chappell, Ben Cleary, Alfredo Franco, Lorrie Goldensohn, Eric Gudas, James Harms, Richard Howard, Randall Jarrell, Heather Ross Miller, Gregory Orr, Adrienne Rich, Deborah Tall, Henry Taylor, Jean Valentine, Ellen Bryant Voigt, Rosanna Warren, and Alan Williamson.

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Letters to the Editor

from George Quasha, in memory of Spencer Holst:

To the Editor:

Spencer Holst died on Thanksgiving at St. Vincent's Catholic Medical Center in lower Manhattan. The cause of death was complications of emphysema and apparent stroke. He was 75.

His unique writings — his inventions, "Spencer Holst stories" — have influenced and been praised by two generations of writers. His books include *On Demons* [1970, with Beate Wheeler], *The Language of Cats & Other Stories* [1971], *Spencer Holst Stories* [1976, a *New York Times* "notable book"], *Something to Read to Someone & Sixteen Drawings* [1980, with Beate Wheeler], *Prose for Dancing* [1983], *The Zebra Storyteller* [1993] and *Brilliant Silence* [2000], the latter four still available from Station Hill / Barrytown, Ltd. Audiographics has published tapes of his readings and plans CD collections in the future.

Spencer Holst was also an extraordinary and prolific painter in later years and exhibited regularly with the painter Beate Wheeler, his wife. (A painting is currently on exhibit at the Westbeth Gallery in Manhattan.)

Spencer Holst's work gained a reputation first from the animated readings he gave during four decades in New York cafés, and since the 1960s he has appeared widely in magazines and anthologies. He curiously straddled very different audiences and literary milieus, mostly published by small magazines and independent publishers but also appearing in the popular press (e.g., *The Language of Cats* was a mass market paperback). His many devoted readers regarded him as under-recognized, yet he received a number of awards, including, for *Spencer Holst Stories*, the Hilda and Richard Rosenthal Foundation Award in 1977 from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He also received an award from the Foundation for Performing Arts. His work has been translated into other languages, including Swedish, Japanese, Spanish, and French. The charm and imaginative accessibility of his work made one wish that his stories become universally known — it would have to be good for the world.

He once said of himself: "In the geography of literature I have always felt my work to be equidistant between two writers, each born in Ohio — Hart Crane and James Thurber, but my wife says don't be silly, your stories are halfway between Hans Christian Andersen and Franz Kafka." Or Borges, greatly admired by Spencer and with whom he had a long correspondence. Yet, according to his sister, Mary-Ella Holst, in the 1950s he identified with the Beats.

Spencer Holst's work was not obviously "experimental" yet he was a storyteller who challenged narrative in many ways, sometimes reducing story to a single sentence, as if the drama of unfolding syntax embodied a secret of story itself. "The bubbling Babylonian tablet came clean in the bath of acid." He made an art in which language has consequences, both in ways we prefer to ignore and on levels we have yet to acknowledge or understand. "When she raises one eyebrow, and one nostril rises into half a sneer, and

one eye closes to a slit — *watch it!."* He felt he had invented a new kind of "very, very short story"; others felt the art he cultivated was liminal to performance and magic, in all of its senses. "My Reader, if you should suddenly discover that you have this very vase in your hands, handle it with care and a certain circumspection." One never heard him refer to himself as a poet, but that non-view would be hard to sustain. "I am stuck in this chair in front of my typewriter like a fly on flypaper."

Quite different poets/writers have praised his work, including John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, Francine Prose, Muriel Rukeyser, John Hollander, Diane Wakoski, Donald Newlove, W.S. Merwin, Allen Ginsberg and Jerome Rothenberg. A *New York Times* reviewer called him "the most skilled fairy-tale artificer of our times." In one edition of *The Norton Anthology of the Short Story*, his stories were the first and the last entries. His work is increasingly taught in schools and universities.

Born July 7th, 1926 in Detroit, Michigan, he grew up in Rossford and Toledo, Ohio, where his father, Lawrence Spencer "Doc" Holst, was for many years a reporter and sports columnist (specializing in the Detroit Tigers) for *The Toledo Blade* and the former *Toledo Times*.

At 16 he dropped out of Scott High School and ran to New York to be a poet. He returned to Toledo but never finished school. He served in the army at the end of World War II, remaining stateside, and worked a short stint in the library of *The Toledo Blade*. Then, in 1957, he returned to New York, determined to be a writer. He married Beate Wheeler, an artist as impecunious as he, and in 1970 they became charter tenants of Westbeth, the artists' residence on the lower West Side, where rents are charged according to a resident's ability to pay. There, where he lived until his death, he played chess (frequently with John Cage during the years he too lived there), wrote his short stories, gave readings, painted and regularly exhibited, often with Beate Wheeler.

For money, which always was short, he did readings in bars, churches, cafés and other paying venues across New York, as well as colleges and universities. "He was a wonderful reader and storyteller," his sister Mary-Ella said. "He could mesmerize an audience." And in an interesting bit of cultural speculation, the *Washington Post* wrote in an article about him in 1975: "In New York City, as in other great and expensive cities of the world, there is a secret network of friends who conspire to live just the way they want, quietly and gently on practically nothing, without the system ever knowing."

Perhaps his best-know short-story collection is *The Language of Cats* (incorporated in *The Zebra Storyteller*), in which, according to *The Saturday Review,* "he creates brief but startling visions of men who are maimed, lost, and lonely, unwarmed by the cold comforts of a scientific age." Muriel Ruyekser offered a corrective to this view many would agree with: "At first I thought *The Language of Cats* was just a book of wry, marvelous fables. But as I went further and began to *feel* entirely different, I saw that what we have here is a matter of ecstasy."

Surviving are his wife, Beate, and sister, Mary-Ella Holst, of Manhattan, and son, Sebastian, daughter-in-law, Dawn, and grandchildren Spencer Robert and Adrianna Beate of Chevy Chase, Maryland.

No funeral was held; his ashes were sent to a family grave site in Ohio. But there will be a memorial at Westbeth, probably early January, the date to be announced.

Those wishing to participate actively in the memorial can contact me [via e-mail].

George Quasha <gquasha@stationhill.org>.
Spencer Holst's "The Zebra Storyteller" appeared in Archipelago*, Vol. 3, No. 1.*

On the work of writers in the present world:

To the Editor:

Thank you for the richness of *Archipelago*. Reading it has helped me see that there are so many people who share my concerns. The problem is that we are isolated. Writers are not in the mindset of conglomerates, which makes it easy for the last to act by "Divide and Rule."

What we can do as individuals is still a lot, and can make a difference. As teachers and professors we can teach how to discern, maybe create a new form of Comparative Literature, that will compare real books to the nonbooks polluting our culture.

As reviewers we can create this kind of review, in which a new book of value is presented along with a nonbook from among the "best sellers." Compare a "how-to" book to passages in literature which deal with human dilemmas in lasting and forceful ways.

Those among us who are successful literary writers can pressure the houses that publish them to devote a percentage of their budget to literary works chosen for their literary value alone, and to invest in their publication the same resources invested in the selling of a commercial book.

We can also demand from the newspapers that, along with and on the same page as, their list of the weekly "best sellers," they publish a list of "best books." Even if many newspapers belong to the same owner-publisher, they cannot exist without their journalists' co-operation.

We can patronize independent bookstores and consider the slight difference in price as our individual contribution to the sustenance of culture. Being creative by nature, we can devise innumerable ways to have our concerns voiced and heard, create change. And since writing is our common language, we should strive to make it the *real* global language, by opening up to the rich diversity of the international spectrum. This applies especially to the insularity of the U.S.A.

As for the nature of change we're witnessing – the second law of thermodynamics applies only to Time, not to what we do in time. Of course the past cannot be changed, but our actions as a society or as individuals can be changed at present and in the future. I am encouraged by the model of the Green Movement. It has built awareness and brought about a reversal of actions: threatened with the possibility that people won't invest in or patronize companies that do harm to our environment, conglomerates as well as small businesses go out of their way to manifest that they are acting ecologically. Maybe we should enlist the Green Movement's support. After all, pollution is pollution, be it intellectual or physical.

I was also thinking that, left to their own ways, big businesses do not find it in their interest to support independent thinking. An intelligent and culturally well-informed reader is not the type of consumer or laborer easy to manipulate. Therefore, I think it is in the interest of our society and democracy, not only in that of the writer, to reverse the tide.

With best wishes for the holiday season,

Corinna Hasofferet <mydream@barak-online.net>

Corinna Hasofferet lives in Tel Aviv; her literary fiction and non-fiction narratives have been published in Hebrew and in translation.

QUICK-EYED LOVE

Susan Garrett

photo Alice Benedict Jackson

Growing up, I was never afraid of the dark. The absence of light in my mother's darkroom made magic possible. During World War Two there were air raid drills in the evenings, and my mother and I went up in the elevator to a neighbor's apartment to sit in the dark. We drank apple cider and listened to the sirens, knowing that it wasn't a real air raid, it was only a practice. Darkness meant a gathering of voices, even laughter. Back in our silent studio my mother turned on the lights in the main room but left the kitchen dark except for a dim red light mounted near the corner of the ceiling. The kitchen was where she made pictures with water, paper, and chemicals. The only sounds there were the gentle squeak of the enlarger as she moved it up and down to fix the right size for the image, and the sound of the developing liquid's soft stir, then water washing.

Before the War, and before the boarding school, I lived across the street in my grandmother's apartment, in Bryn Mawr, on the Philadelphia Main Line — the name given to a string of wealthy suburbs along the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, going west from the city. From the window I could see the tops of trains as they passed and thought it would be fun to ride a train to the West. At a quarter to six in the evening my grandmother got up from her piano and let me come into the living room to turn on the radio for fifteen minutes to listen to a cowboy story on the Tom Mix program while she went to the dining room sideboard and poured whiskey from a glass decanter. Usually my mother came in before supper to hear the radio news about Hitler and war in Europe. She lived in her photography studio on the first floor of another six-story brick apartment building across Montgomery Avenue. On some afternoons I stood next to her in the darkroom and watched her attach a clothespin to each end of a long strip of film, hold it up with a hand at either end so that the strip relaxed its center into a U-shaped curve, then move it through a flat pan of liquid with a back-and-forth motion, evenly, so that every square negative on the film had an equal chance to bathe. There were three rectangular pans of liquid on the table — one with developer, the middle one with water, and a third with the fixing fluid. Back and forth, up and down, she moved the film with a gentle motion, then rinsed it in the middle pan and hung it straight down from a hook on the ceiling above the sink. The clothespin attached to the bottom of the film kept it from curling. But the best part came when she printed large soft black-and-white photographs. In the dark she cut a small negative from the strip of film and put it in her enlarger — a tall awkward machine whose light near the top shone down through the negative onto a white sheet of paper at the bottom. She turned the handle of the enlarger to make the picture large or small, to make it whole or to cut out parts of it. When she turned off the light in the enlarger the image disappeared, but right away she slid the paper into a pan of developing fluid and by magic the image reappeared, creating itself out of whiteness in its watery birthplace, this time to stay. There were pictures of children who lived in houses with big lawns on the Main Line, and of older girls who would soon graduate from Shipley School, whose pictures would be placed in rows in the school yearbook.

This is how my mother earned her living. She was not married, which I understood to be a serious sadness. She had divorced my father and she took care of my grandmother who was angry a lot of the time. At supper they spoke French. Speaking French showed that you were of the best people, but I did not understand what they were saying. Our maid Nelda served us and I wanted to eat in the kitchen with Nelda instead of in the dining room where I had to be silent. After supper I told her about what happened to Tom Mix while I helped her dry the dishes. She was black and warm and she knew that I loved the West. I dried the dinner plates too slowly and she told me to hurry up because she wanted to finish and go home. She would take the last plate from my hand and dry it herself, laughing and saying that I had better work faster if I wanted to live on a prairie because out there it was hard, it wasn't all just singing, there was a lot of work to do.

Soon after my grandmother began to climb out of the bathtub and stomp around the apartment with no clothes on, shouting and dripping water, my mother drove me to Delaware to a boarding school with apple orchards on its grounds. It had an outdoor atmosphere, she said. I unpacked my suitcase in a room where there were already three other girls, and one of them showed me where I would sleep, on a cot on the sleeping porch where there were 28 cots, in two rows — half where you could sleep with your head near the wall of the building and the other half along the outside wall of window screens, where, if your head was near the screen part, you could wake up feeling rain, or snow in winter, unless you made your bed so that your head was next to the aisle, away from the

screen. The sleeping porch on the floor below us had the same number of beds. The boys lived in a different building.

I learned the routine. A bugle call at 6:00 in the morning woke us up. We made our beds and did jobs before breakfast. My job was to mop the dust under the beds on the sleeping porch. The mop had a long handle and a rectangle of soft black string loops that picked up dust under a bed if I pushed it forward, but getting dust from around the two metal bed feet against the wall was tricky, you had to swipe the dust with your finger and then steer the mop just right to pick it up. The main thing was to learn exactly the right way to do something so that you could work fast and not be late for breakfast. We lined up for meals, ate without lingering, ran back and sat in our rooms for twenty minutes to think quietly about God, then went to classes and lunch and classes again, then to field hockey. The hockey stick was curved at the bottom and not very wide, and it was tricky to stop the hard little ball with it and then hit it far enough so that the teacher — the same woman who blew the bugle in the morning — didn't have to yell. When I was lucky I stopped the ball, not often but more times than the girl who slept next to me on the sleeping porch. Her name was Silvana and she told me that she came from Spain through France with her mother on a train at night and what she remembers is the dark. She was a refugee and this was a school for refugee children, she said. Am I a refugee? I wondered. If I were not, why would I be here? But how could I be a refugee? The war had not come to America.

After supper we dried dishes in the kitchen. At night we did our homework. When we weren't in class or playing hockey or doing homework, we raked leaves and pulled grass from between the bricks in the path from our building to the dining hall, and on Saturdays in the fall we picked apples, all day, climbing the trees and stretching our arms. The trick was to hold as many apples as we could with one hand against our chest and at the same time climb down the tree. I learned that if you worked hard without being a gold-brick, the teachers thought you were good and praised you. Silvana asked if we could all stand around the tree and shake it, as she had seen people in Spain do with olive trees. We would be hit on the head by apples falling to the ground but it would be fun, she said. The other children made fun of Silvana and one of them threw an apple and hit her on the forehead. She did not seem to mind. She said she couldn't wait until the apples were turned into apple cider, which happened during October in a big vat outside the back door to the dining hall. A teacher who ate breakfast with us explained how cider is made: from fresh apples that have good color (if they had fallen from the trees, they were gathered up promptly), washed well by hand in a large tub with water running through it, then put through a grater (a cylinder, surrounded by metal teeth, that revolves fast and crushes the apples to pulp), the pulp wrapped in cloth as if it were cheese and placed in layers on a mechanical press with a board on top, the screw tightened to bring the top of the press down on the pulp and press out the juice, through a strainer. The juice flowed into a storage tank and stayed there for two days (in cold weather) to let the sediment settle to the bottom, then ran through a small faucet on the side of the tank into glass bottles which were placed in the refrigerator. There was no need to pasteurize it because we all drank it so fast.

On Sundays we went for walks. In winter I wore a snowsuit that was made of rough wool and rubbed against my legs, and I was often slow getting ready. One Sunday afternoon in December, I was the last one ready and hoped that the others would go without me. The radio in the hall had been left on and I heard that Japan had attacked America at Pearl Harbor and we were at war. I ran down the stairs and called to the hockey teacher, and she and the others came back to listen. Everyone was quiet, listening.

Silvana shook her head back and forth. No one spoke, even after we turned off the radio and started walking. The more we walked that day the more my legs hurt, and there was nothing I could do because we were on a dirt road between fields and woods, a new walk that we had not taken before, and I could not run back to my room to put on a pair of long stockings. I sat down in the woods to rest and wrapped my scarf around one leg, then held my cold glove against the skin of the other leg. What does it mean, to be at war? I did not know, but my mother would know, she talked a lot about the war in Europe. When Christmas vacation came I would ask her about war.

I zipped up my snowsuit and looked around. The others were gone. The dirt road ended where I sat, and they could have turned left or right along the fence, I did not know which. Behind me were woods and the edge of the roof of a house. I walked to the house to ask someone the way to the school. No one answered the front door when I knocked, so I sat down near one of the apple trees in the yard. Someone might come along. No one in the whole world knows where I am right now, I thought. So quiet here, not even birds calling to each other. Nothing to be afraid of. Some plates were lying on the ground near a shed, under a clothesline, and there were seeds on them, for birds maybe.

A man came around the side of the shed. He was short and he smiled at me, and his eyes squinted as if to help him see my face. He asked me who I was, and I said I was from the school, and he said oh yes, over there and pointed to the left side of the field, so now I knew which way I was supposed to go. I began to cry and he asked me if I was lost, and I said no, not any more. You had to have a reason to cry, and I thought of one. I said I didn't want to go to supper at the school tonight because after supper we took turns drying plates and I was always slow at it. A girl named Janene dried plates fast, I said.

"She dries one plate, then the next?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so."

"Then I show you a trick." With one hand he picked up three of the plates that were on the ground and let the seeds fall from them. With a rag in his other hand he wiped the top of the first plate and the bottom of the third, then placed the top plate on the bottom, wiped the top of the second plate and the bottom of the first, and finally placed the second plate on the bottom and wiped the top of the third plate and the bottom of the second.

"Try it," he said, and handed me the plates.

I took them and tried to hold all three in one hand.

"I might drop them, my hand is too small."

"Stretch your hand. Feel your strong fingers underneath."

I wiped the plates as he had done, and I did not drop them.

"Now again. You must practice."

I was ten years old, and I loved this trick. I stood in the cold December sunshine wiping plates, again and again, with a kind man who spoke with a funny accent. Maybe my mother could come and take a picture of us. She could stand over there with the sun behind her and snap our picture, then later with the enlarger she could cut out of the picture whatever she wanted to.

"These apple trees look different from the ones at the school," I said.

"They are Japanese. Very hard and sweet."

That night after supper, in the big kitchen with the hockey teacher who was washing dishes in a sink, I tried the new way of drying. The school's plates were thinner than those the man had. I could hold all three at once without being afraid of dropping them. The hockey teacher noticed what I was doing and smiled, directly at me.

When it was time to go home for Christmas I rode the train from Wilmington to Philadelphia and stood on the platform between rail cars because the train was crowded with soldiers. Soldiers had all the seats. Some stood in the aisles and between cars on the metal floor that shifted under our feet and left a space through which I could look down and see the wooden ties of the tracks as the train raced over them, and hear the sound of metal wheels on metal. I got off the train at 30th Street Station and ran to my mother. We rode the Paoli Local to Bryn Mawr, and I told her about getting lost one day and how a man with an accent who lived in a house over the field from the school grew Japanese apples and showed me a trick about drying plates and how I couldn't wait to show Nelda.

"Is he a Japanese man?" my mother asked me.

"I guess so."

My grandmother lay on her bed. She was sick and would have to go again to the hospital. When it was time to go back to school, I asked my mother if she could drive me and stop first at the house of my new friend to meet him and take his picture.

She was quiet for a long time. She let her head drop forward and I stared at her lovely soft brown hair that curled under, inward, in a slight puff at the ends. Then she mumbled, "What have I done?" and then, over and over, "I don't know what to do, don't know what to do." It made me sad because I did not know what to do either.

Then she said, "You see, we are at war now. We have to do things we would not do otherwise. I called the F.B.I. and told them about the Japanese man, because we have to be sure he is not a spy. We have to do everything we can for the war."

Our Sunday walks at school that winter took us in different directions but not near the house of my friend. I wanted to find the house but I worried about getting lost. Finally on a walk in early spring I saw the house in near distance and ran to knock on the door. The teacher called me to come back but right away two older people, a man and a woman, opened the door and I asked them about the Japanese man.

"You mean our gardener? He left last week. He went on a train to the West. Are you with that group of children?"

"Yes," I said.

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I am not a photographer. But now, years later, I look at photographs and read books about photography for reasons that are piled up unsorted in my mind.

I tell myself not to expect much information from a photograph, even though it represents a moment in real time, but then I ignore my own warning and stare at details one after the other, in stone carvings on tall cathedrals, the shapes of leaves, shadows on water and expressions on the faces of children.

By chance I have found in the library a book called MANZANAR, a documentary account in words and photographs of one of the internment camps in California where Japanese Americans were incarcerated "on racial grounds alone, on false evidence of military necessity" after the attack on Pearl Harbor. John Hersey wrote the text and Ansel Adams made the photographs. I look at Adams' photographs with a longing for information beyond what they can give, thinking of the kind man who in 1941 showed me a way to dry dinner plates and then watched me go in the right direction toward the boarding school. If he was interned, then I was to blame. Was my friend sent to Manzanar? Would a Japanese American living in central Delaware have been transported such a distance? I look hard at the faces in the photographs but do not recognize him. Our encounter took place a long time ago. One photograph, called "Mess Line: Noon at Manzanar," shows adults and children waiting in line to enter a plyboard tarpaper-covered

building, one of a group of barracks-like structures built on a piece of flat land near mountain ranges. The distant mountains are high, snow-covered, and touched by a feathery sweep of clouds. The people on the ground are small in the picture. Some of them notice the photographer up on the roof; others pay no attention. Some fold their arms around themselves as if they were cold. One of the narrow chimney pipes on the roof has smoke rising from it, so perhaps it is warm inside the building. The people are not the central feature of the photograph and they seem to know this. They are secondary to the landscape in a picture that may be saying (if photographs convey more than beauty and form, if they also give us messages) that the place is more important than any particular moment in an individual's day.

Ansel Adams loved heights. Standing on the platform he built on top of his station wagon in 1943, he aimed his camera at stretches of California desert rising to high mountain peaks in the distance. From his car roof he could see at a better angle, and let his camera lens gather in more of a reflecting lake or the rock-strewn ground of a valley below the mountains. At Manzanar he climbed up on roofs and guard towers, and from his work we know what is all *around* the people and conditions at Manzanar. Perhaps Adams was shy, hesitant, unwilling to let his camera intrude on contained privacy. The Japanese Americans are already prisoners, why assault them further by photographing them? He kept his distance. Were there too many restrictions placed on him (he was not permitted to photograph guard towers, barbed wire, or the guards themselves)? He backed away from rude injustice, climbed onto a roof and avoided intimacy. The assignment came early in his career. This was his first and only attempt at documentary photography, and he brought to the work his own love of sky and mountains, clouds, the California sunlight. The beauty of the land the Japanese Americans could see from where they stood would mitigate the injustice and discomfort of their immediate lives. Did Adams believe that? Or am I reading into the picture, looking for my friend? Other pictures in the book are of the people of Manzanar dutifully photographed close up, most of them smiling, posed, in sun-lit head portraits, some married couples in their tidy small quarters, a few groups such as a choir practicing and a school class. All know they are being photographed. There are pictures of a Catholic church and a Buddhist church, a baseball game, girls playing volleyball, a couple sitting together in front of a YMCA building, a beaming young man holding a cabbage in each arm, farm pictures of crops, of chickens and hogs in their pens. There was work to do at Manzanar.

I turn to John Hersey's text in MANZANAR, written in 1942, two years before Adams took his photographs, and read a story altogether different — a harsh life for people forced from their homes and stripped of their possessions, a life in barracks surrounded by armed guards and barbed wire where men and women separately lined up for communal toilets and bathed in horse showers, ate meals in mess halls on tin plates, slept on metal cots with eight or more others in the room. Only families had a small private place, twenty by twenty-five feet. But in the photographs, families appear relaxed, comfortable. Adams reveals little of what Hersey describes. Photographs and text do not complement one another in this book; in fact, they disagree and contradict. Adams chose not to photograph misery. Perhaps he did not see it. Or did not want to invade the privacy of people who were living with what they had. Should he have waited inconspicuously in the shadows until he saw misery and quickly snapped it? A photographer's work can tell us as much about the photographer as about the subject. If another documentary artist — Dorothea Lange, for instance — had been given the Manzanar assignment, would she or he have featured individuals but missed the surrounding land? Does each photographer show a different particle of the truth? Lange photographed migrant workers in California during

the 1930s Depression and was able to come close enough to a migrant mother and her two children — who lean on her, one on each side, with their heads turned away from the camera — to photograph the despair and strength in her prematurely age-lined face and the clear fact that in spite of her poverty (Lange's field notes read: "Camped on the edge of a pea field where the crop had failed in a freeze. The tires had just been sold from the car to buy food. She was 32 years old with seven children.") she has clothed herself and her children and cut their hair in a neat and skillful way, the quintessential survivor. Did Dorothea Lange assume suffering on the part of all migrants so that she sought it out, waited, guided her camera to it? In her photographs she caught more courage than despair. That may have been her intent all along. Or the intent of the individuals whose own personalities were magically charged by the presence of the camera.

John Hersey wrote his description of Manzanar early in the relocation, and by the time Ansel Adams arrived in 1944, the people appear to have settled and created for themselves an inner-peaceful life. Adams is quoted in the text: "I believe that the arid splendor of the desert, ringed with towering mountains, has strengthened the spirit of the people of Manzanar." Adams loved the California landscape so much that he assumed its beneficial effect on all who lived in it, even prisoners of injustice. Is the photographer imposing his own view on others?

I think Adams may have captured a truth behind the obvious "mistake of terrifically horrible proportions" of gathering and incarcerating loyal Americans only because of their race — that life at Manzanar was full of work, of finding out how to do certain things (as in a magnificent indoor picture, "Hands of Lathe Worker" on page 26), of school and prayer and sports and farm tasks. Manzanar means "apple orchard" in Spanish. Were there apples there, as in Delaware? It appears to be a dry valley with few trees, but the prisoners are growing rows and rows of vegetables. Adams' photographs may be telling us that the landscape itself surrounded these dignified people with the strongest kind of beauty — implying that in such a place some joy would enter.

I do not know. It is unlikely that my friend was at Manzanar. Japanese-Americans from the East were sent to Arkansas, I learned later. He could have been at any of the other camps, or not interned at all. He could have gone west of his own accord.

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On the inside wall of her studio, opposite the window, my mother mounted three long parallel strips of copper-covered wood spaced so that between them she could place her photographic prints, each mounted on white paper and covered by glass. The prints between the top and second copper strips were placed diagonally above those between the second and third copper strips to make a shining, two-tiered checkerboard of photographs. It was a modern design, she told me. She loved modern art — the small cube-filled paintings in the old townhouse of the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, some paintings by Arthur Dove in another museum. From the way she pronounced his name — *Duuuhv* — drawn out and loving with a dreamy admiration in her voice, I knew he must be a very good painter.

The copper strips reflected light from the window and from the tall studio lamps, even though the copper itself was slightly wrinkled and uneven on the surface. Our history teacher at school said that the first known mirror was found in Egypt in about 2800 B.C. and was made of copper. An ancient metal can make a modern design — long lines of copper framing the two rows of glass-covered photographs only at the top and bottom, not at the sides. To be modern, she said, means to subtract decoration, to let lines themselves be the center of attention.

In some of her photographs, everything was still, no one and nothing in motion. One was a portrait of my mother's sister, Aunt Mildred. She wears a straw hat through which light shines from behind, making a halo of straw on her head as she looks down with dignity and sadness. I knew that you could not take a picture facing toward the light because the light will shine into the lens and ruin the picture, but my mother had gotten around this rule and placed an indoor studio lamp directly behind her sister, facing the camera. She used clothespins to clip tissue paper onto the metal shutters of the lamp to soften the light, and then she rolled up a piece of black paper into a long cone-shaped protector and held one end of it over the camera lens. The light did what she wished it to do. I stared at my aunt's hat and wondered how something as ordinary as straw could be so beautiful without looking like something else. Another picture showed a roof of shingles, photographed up close, with snow that had formed itself into long pointed icicle-like strips. Just that patch of roof with ice-like snow, nothing to show whether it is the roof of a house or a shed, or where it is. Just itself, unbordered. For a second, on first glance, it looks like surf on sand, but then it asks for another look and we know it is a roof. Should a photograph play a game, asking us to wonder for a few seconds what we are seeing? The spikes of snow are beginning to melt, reassuringly, on warm shingles in the sun.

Some of these photographs were surprises, I thought — unexpected views suddenly caught by an artist's eye in league with a mechanical invention. A picture of a pattern of sunlight and shadows against a stone corner of the boardwalk in Atlantic City. Another of the shadows made by round outdoor metal tables — an ordinary sight but an amazing pattern. "Let your eyes roam around the picture. Look for lines, first. Then curves. Follow them with your eyes, see how they move and match and combine, and contradict one another," she said to me one time on a visit to the Museum of Modern Art in New York where she loved to go. "Your eyes can wander around and enjoy themselves. Then notice how the picture is composed, the space divided and balanced. After that, ask what it features, what it wants you to notice." I learned that photographs are compositions, like paintings but with a difference. The photographer decides where to stand, what to include, what to feature, but fact and light always dominate.

On her wall there were pictures of children laughing and running around the lawns of large Main Line houses, rhododendron in the background. There were other quiet pictures with no motion in them — the child of a teacher at the boarding school peering from the window of his wooden playhouse, a high downward-looking view of a patterned brick drive where a small girl stands alone with a balloon, taken from the balcony of Goodhart Hall at Bryn Mawr College. In these, I think now, was a combination of planning and accident, of waiting for a child to be comfortable in the photographer's presence and catching a moment that is both anticipated and surprising. Another was of a young black boy taken at the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, leaning on his arm which showed a safety pin, gleaming in the light, holding his cuff together at the wrist.

"You see, his mother is poor but she went to some trouble to find that safety pin and fasten his cuff," my mother said. It could have been his mother, I thought, but perhaps it was someone else. A photograph can show what was done before the moment. There was variety to my mother's photographs — no one theme or predictable subject matter to tell us now that these were the work of a certain artist, as one recognizes instantly a picture of mountains and light in California by Ansel Adams, or the New York City buildings taken by Alfred Stieglitz from his window. She photographed what she encountered in her limited world, what she loved looking at, what others asked of her.

All the photographs were black and white gelatin silver prints, except for two platinum prints made before platinum-coated paper was no longer on the shelves of the Kodak store at 16th and Sansom Streets in Philadelphia where my mother bought her supplies. She spent hours in the store, it seemed, talking to the sales clerks, laughing, asking them about themselves and lingering in this small world of cameras and paraphernalia where she spoke the language and discarded some of her loneliness. I stood and waited, staring at shelves lined with bottles of developer and hypo fluids, bright yellow boxes of film stacked according to size, big advertising posters from Eastman Kodak high over the shelves. On the way back to the train station, we stopped at the new Horn & Hardart Automat on Chestnut Street, where you could put five nickels in a slot and make a glass door open and release a sandwich for lunch, before we took the train, the Paoli Local, back to Bryn Mawr.

I thought I belonged at the boarding school and should stay there because of all the work that had to be done every day. But in 1943, my grandmother died, and my mother brought me back to Bryn Mawr to live with her in her studio and go on a scholarship to a private day school called Agnes Irwin. The studio's window looked out on the back driveway of the apartment building, where delivery and furnace repair trucks could pull up. Beyond that, at the edge of a lawn, was my mother's small garden. She had permission from the landlord to dig and plant it. But it was the inside wall of the studio that I stared at, looking up from my homework, daydreaming my eyes away from the Latin sentences I had to construct. How did a carpenter bend the copper around the wooden strips and attach the copper to the wood? There were no nails that I could see. Perhaps they were hidden on the back. What kept the copper strips attached to the wall, to support the photographs? From my three years at boarding school I learned how important it is to know how things can be held in place — how to keep a ladder from slipping off the trunk of an apple tree, how to hold a dustpan with one hand and sweep dust with a tall-handled broom in the other hand. I believed that I must learn how things work. Even on Friday evenings at the boarding school, when we were supposed to have a party in a large room and listen to records of war songs like "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," the science teacher would turn off the record player to explain to us how a recording is made by a needle, called a stylus, attached to a pickup arm that cuts a spiral groove in a black plastic disk and, as it does this, is moved by sound waves to indent contours on the right side and left side of the spiral groove. When we play the record, the needle vibrates against those contours and the vibrations send electric signals through the pickup arm to an amplifier. The electric signals are analogous to the sound waves of the music and reproduce them for our ears. (I remember having to look up the word "analogous" in the dictionary to find out that it means "like," or "similar to.") Long after the boarding school I thought about the inner workings of daily phenomena. When the wind blows the branches of a tree, why do they bend and not break? Why do the metal wheels of a train rolling on a metal track make no sparks? I could see none when I stood between rail cars on the train to school, from Bryn Mawr to Wynnewood, and looked down at the tracks through an open space. Does metal riding on metal create friction? Only when it slides. Not when it rolls. The workings of ordinary things engaged me.

I was surly toward my mother, who was alone and not married like other Main Line mothers, and I did not tell her what I knew even then — that our small apartment was safe and that the wall of her photographs was beautiful. I think of that wall now as a long horizontal window letting the world in piece by piece. In the evenings I sat on the studio daybed and did my homework in my lap while my mother addressed envelopes for invitations at her desk. It was a job she did at night to earn money, working for the women

who arranged weddings and debutante parties for rich people, and it was her graceful handwriting that got her the job. My father sent no money and I knew that her life was hard. For three years during the War she had taken the train at 4:00 in the morning to Philadelphia to work in a defense factory testing resistors for the electric circuits in American airplanes, and she told stories about the marvelous women she worked with in the factory who teased her about her speech and said she didn't talk like people from inside the city. I learned later that the sound of the way she and her friends spoke is called a "broad A" accent. One woman at the factory asked her why she spoke that way, and she couldn't think of an answer but finally said that her own mother came from the South, meaning Alabama, and the woman thought she meant South Philadelphia and laughed and said that was *it*, shouting to the others that "Alice is from *South*. . ." I did not know, then, what South Philadelphia was like. Did we belong to some fringe corner of the upper class, I wondered, and how is that possible with no money? My mother had grown up with some money and was pushed hard by my grandmother to make friends among the best families of Philadelphia society.

My grandmother's home in Huntsville, Alabama ("there was nothing, nothing after the War," she used to say), must have seemed a blank space surrounded by sorrow. So many men had died in the Civil War, and those who returned were wounded or changed — no longer young, not thinking about work or learning or marriage, only the moment. Her two older brothers went North, where there was a possibility of something, through the kindness of some wealthy friends of cousins in New York who could open a door or two, perhaps for a job or an invitation to a ball. Their sister joined them. She married a quiet northerner who made a respectable living in an insurance firm in Philadelphia, who had longed to be an actor. In the evenings he retreated to his attic study to write a book about Hamlet, while my grandmother forged a path into Philadelphia society — that group of established families, rich and correctly mannered, whose daughters were introduced at debutante balls to young men of the same circle who asked them to dance and looked them over for marriage. She arranged to have my mother introduced to society at a grand ball for debutantes, and she watched from a small balcony above the ballroom to see which young men danced with her daughter. She brought a pencil with her and wrote down the names of those who went up to her daughter right away when the music began, without having to be urged by a hostess to go and dance with one of the girls who had been left standing. If she did not know a particular name she walked down to the edge of the ballroom floor and whispered her question to one of the other hostesses while pointing at the young man in question. She noted the times her daughter had been left standing, without a partner, and noted which young man had been pushed towards her, and how long he had lingered to converse after the dance ended. "Well, now you have met everyone there *is* to meet," she said to my mother at the end of the debutante season. Ten years later she called on my father's mother and arranged the marriage. "He will do," she told my mother. A wedding, and three months later my mother returned to my grandmother's house. Then her pregnancy, my grandmother's dismay, and the ending of all ties with my father — no money for child support, no visits.

Would it be better for children, easier for them later to carry memory with grace, if they could understand at the time the painful lives of their parents and grandparents? I wish I had known at the time how my grandmother felt. When I was with her I sensed a heavy block of sadness but did not know how to separate the pieces. Her husband dead, son dead, oldest daughter divorced, money lost in the 1929 stock market crash, an annoying granddaughter underfoot in a small apartment where no one came to call, no one except the pianists Robert and Gaby Casadesus who were her teachers at

Fontainebleau one summer, who came once for tea, sat politely in the living room, and left. Only her youngest daughter, my Aunt Mildred, was properly married to a well-to-do young man who joined the Army as an officer. It was too much disappointment, too much loneliness for a woman who had left the South because there was "nothing" there after the Civil War. In my childish view, there was nothing now in her life except her piano, her whiskey, and the photograph on her bureau of Mont St.-Michel in France, that I could see at a distance from the edge of her bedroom doorway. Music filled her day, and even though the piano sound was a hard, pounding one most of the time, she played one beautiful short piece with a melody so lovely and an ending so contented that I asked her to play it for me every night before I went to sleep. "Wait until I get in bed," I said, and then ran to climb in and call to her, "All right," and then she would play the piece I loved, that I have not been able to find since. Was it Schubert? Scarlatti? Chopin? The tonal resolution at the end, a quiet progression from dominant to tonic (home) that eased me down into sleep, let me love tonal music so deeply that I have difficulty turning from it long enough to follow the lines and edges of modern atonality.

Some of my mother's friends hired her to photograph their children and she earned money that way. She had a funny way with children. She would sit down on the ground and giggle and then they forgot about having their pictures taken and played as if there were no camera there, just a silly lady who liked them. And she was quick, quick to snap the picture. The small exposure meter she held up to measure the strength of the light didn't click or make a noise so the younger ones paid no attention to it, or to the camera either, but I know the older ones closer to my age of 12 must have noticed the camera. It was a new Rolleiflex, an intriguing black box with a single curved lens on the front that moved forward to focus the picture, and a top whose lid opened so that she could look down into it. There was a silver crank handle for turning the film after she had snapped the picture. I wanted to see how the subject looked in the black box, and I wondered why others my age would ignore the camera and just let themselves be photographed. Were they pleased, flattered, imagining themselves in a picture, posing, thinking how they looked, or trying not to pose, trying to be natural? How could they be sure they were natural?

She spent hours in her darkroom. Sometimes I stood in the dark with her. Amazement, fascination, pure stunning wonder at what happened there — all did away with some of my sullen anger at not having a real kitchen with a servant in it, as my friends had in their houses. There was a dim red light in one corner of the ceiling. The tall enlarger stood on a side table. She no longer developed her film in three flat pans of liquid. Now she had a small black tank that held the film strip on a roller. Into it she poured liquids, first water, then developer, again water, then the fixing bath, and more water. When the film was safely inside the tank, in its own darkness, she could turn on the light in the darkroom. The enamel pans on the table were for printing, and the sink was ready for rinsing the photographs before she took them to the bathroom tub for a long washing. "You have to wash photographs a long time, or years from now they will turn brown," she told me.

On the Main Line small local trains stopped at each town's station — Overbrook, Merion, Narberth, and so on, all the way to Paoli from Philadelphia and back — all day and part of the night. We could hear the trains from our apartment building but could not see them. To go to school in the morning I walked on a shortcut path along the tracks to Bryn Mawr station and could see the big trains going west, slowly, with soldiers leaning through the windows and looking, it seemed, at every bridge and building and person on their way. Some of them waved at me, and I waved back.

I knew a lot about the war from photographs in the newspaper *The Evening Bulletin*, and from our history teacher at school, who, after she had talked about ancient history in Egypt and asked questions to see if we had read the chapter in our textbook, told us about the war going on now, and, especially, the Italian Campaign. She brought a newspaper photograph of Monte Cassino, the fifth-century monastery in Italy that was bombed by *our* bombers — not by the enemy but by *us*, the Allies. A photographer had taken the picture from a distance just at the moment when a bomb was exploding on the roof of the monastery, a terrible moment, far from here. Our teacher wanted the class to see this picture. Something in early history was being destroyed and we must learn to care about very old buildings and monuments of the past.

What could we do, now, about destruction? Children were powerless to help in the war. All I could do was buy war stamps to paste in a book and collect enough stamp books to turn in for a war bond. I wondered where the photographer stood to take the picture of Monte Cassino, whether he was out looking for something to photograph that day and suddenly heard the bombing, and focused his camera in a split second. Did he consider himself lucky? Was it his good fortune that he was there, ready, when this terrible thing happened? How often does photography depend on luck — bad for the people who are in the way of the disastrous event and good for the photographer? A contradiction so enormous, a small picture cannot contain it. When I asked my mother about the newspaper photograph, she said that the man who took it was brave to be there and was helping in the war by showing us its horrors so that we will never, ever go to war again. Newspaper photographs have a purpose, to let us see the real world and let the real world change us even when we cannot travel into it ourselves. We stay home in safety and use our minds to imagine the suffering of others. But the photograph of Monte Cassino showed only the building, not the people inside. It would have been dangerous for the photographer to go too close. Later, after the bombers had gone, then would he have run down the wooded hill and somehow crossed the river and gone up the mountain itself to enter the monastery ruins and take pictures of terrified people and old stones crumbled? If he wanted to help the people, he would have had to put down his camera and risk losing it in the confusion of slaughter and smoke. A photographer cannot take that risk. Once on the beach at Cape May, New Jersey, my mother put her camera down to help an older woman who had fallen, and after she had lifted the woman and eased her along to the lifeguard station, she came back and couldn't find her camera, for several minutes, because I had covered it with a towel to protect it from sand. Her panic was too great to hide with proper calm behavior. I could see that she thought she had lost everything. When I pulled away the towel she picked up the camera and carefully wiped from it a few grains of sand, then held up a copy of *Life* magazine that the camera had rested on. On the cover was a photograph of tall gray tower-like structures with lines both straight and diagonal, small holes in the walls and a curved edge on the top of each with sunlight shining on the curves. It was a modern design. Two men at the bottom of the picture are bending over a wire, or a water hose, and they are so small they are almost lost compared to the massive grandeur of the towers. My mother said that a man named Ralph Ingersoll, one of the men who started *Life* magazine, had called her to ask if she had a photograph he could use for the cover of the first issue, and she had to tell him she didn't have anything at the moment, and then he had called someone named Margaret Bourke-White, who was a year younger than she was. Margaret Bourke-White could say yes, because she had the nerve to take off for the West to photograph a big Roosevelt project putting people to work building a damn on the Missouri River. She had the courage to stay in a strange town in Montana by herself and photograph the workers' shanty towns and even the bars where they go at the

end of the day. Margaret Bourke-White had an *education*, she had gone to college, more than one college, and had no fear, no inhibitions, could go into the office of a prominent man to take his picture and get down on the floor and photograph him from the ground up as if he were a towering menace. Not even her divorce held her back, she was brave, she put herself out on a limb, took chances. Imagine going to the West, alone, anytime you want!

"I'll go with you," I said.

She hugged me and said she had forgotten to put oil on her shoulders and the sun had burned her. It was time to go.

I want to go back and change her life for her. If I could travel to time past — as photographers so blatantly let us believe we can — and carry with me what I have learned from reading histories of photography, then we would start together at the beginning. She loved knowing things.

"I had no education," she would say, apropos of nothing I understood. "You see, my mother made sacrifices to send me to the best violin teacher, Leopold Auer, and insisted that I practice the violin, all the time, and let me go to school only two days a week, so I was always behind in school work, I never caught up with the others. Mr. Auer knew I wasn't a talented musician, I could see it in his face, but my mother was sacrificing so much! She said that when I played for society gatherings, the young men, maybe one of the Ingersolls, would see my beautiful arm moving across the violin and want to marry me. . . ." An intelligent woman, with an inquiring mind — I knew she was that. She might have studied science and history on her own, and she would have liked some small sections of chemistry books that describe what happened in her darkroom when she eased the exposed paper into the developer.

"I never got the reading habit," she said.

I will go back and read with her.

She kept the shade of the window in her studio room raised, to let in as much sunlight as possible, in contrast to her darkroom where she turned on the electric light only when we ate supper on the table cleared of pans of developer and hypo. The studio was a box and the window a small hole. If I had known of such a thing at the time, I would have imagined us living inside a "show box" and celebrating photography's origins. Accounts of its history differ according to whether art historians or scientists are writing them. Most art historians choose a late beginning, in the early nineteenth century with the miraculous birth of the "fixed" image. Most science writers begin with the sun. As a child I did not know how to connect what I knew about the sun — that it is too bright to look at straight, that it can burn the skin — with the magic I saw in the darkroom. One morning at school we went outside to see a partial eclipse of the sun. We held up a piece of cardboard with a small hole in it and on a second piece of cardboard we saw a bright circle cut with a curved shadow. The sun made a picture of itself. Aristotle had noticed this in the fourth century B.C. — that the sun, even when it shines through a square hole, makes a round spot of light on the ground. What Aristotle saw was an image, not of the hole but of the sun. The sun was in charge. Man's desire, since caveman days, to create pictures of himself and his world, was a direct copy of what the sun itself wanted to do.

Photography began with observations — all separated by distance and centuries — of the image made by reflected rays of light when they enter a pinhole made in a box, or a hole in the wall of a darkened room. My mother and I could have imagined light rays crossing one another as they shone through our small window, as the Chinese scientist Shen K'uo described them in the eleventh century A.D. He compared the crossing rays of light at a pinhole to oars in oarlocks "when the oar handle is down, the blade is up." (Now,

the sight of oars in a rowboat on a lake, with the crossed wrists of the rower holding the handles low, lets me think of light rays.) We could pretend that our studio window was a hole in a screen made by another eleventh century scientist, the Arabian physicist Alhazen, who observed the difference made by the size of the hole. He arranged three candles in a row in front of the screen's hole. The candle to the right of the hole made an image on the left part of the wall behind the screen. The image of the candle to the left appeared on the right. When he made the hole larger, the images faded into soft patches. A small hole focuses light, but a small hole does not allow in enough light to copy the brilliance of the candle. How could a larger hole be altered to let in more light and, at the same time, hold the rays of light together to form a clear image? Something like a lens had been found in the ruins at Nineveh, capital of ancient Assyria from 2300 to 605 B.C., a "curved ornament of rock crystal," flat on one side, rounded on the other, and probably used to magnify the objects seen through it. My mother talked a lot with the sales people at the Kodak store about the "good" lens they had sold her, and often in the evenings, after she had finished addressing envelopes, she would hold a lens in her hand, gaze at it and hold it up to the light on her desk, rub her fingers over it, then wipe it with a handkerchief. Would she have liked knowing about Roger Bacon, a thirteenth-century English scientist who wrote about the use of a magnifying glass to change the direction of light rays when they enter the glass, to refract, or focus, the rays to center them on the task of making a clear image? It was Bacon who suggested putting an inclined mirror in front of the hole to reflect the image onto a viewing window in the top of the box. The Rolleiflex camera my mother carried down the rich people's tree-lined driveways had a viewing window. She looked down into it to see an image reflected by a mirror. Perhaps her absorption in her work was enough for her. An enormous task — first, find the entrance gates of the long driveway to the house, without wasting gasoline in wartime. Greet the children with a comfortable smile and then sit around, in no hurry, to give them time to take her for granted. Then take, develop, print, and present her photographs to the children's parents. Would she have had time and energy left over to delight in the history of photography?

She and I did not laugh together very much, and that was a loss, because with others my mother overflowed with regard for every word they spoke, every snapshot they showed her of their relatives and travels. When someone told her a joke she laughed with abandon. Her laughter was guileless, completely trusting. Roland Barthes, in his CAMERA LUCIDA (the best of books on photography and memory), searches for his mother and finds her at last, in one place only, in a photograph of her as a small child. I do not search for my mother, as Barthes did, because I find her in her own photographs and those of others, in the laughter of children and her own unexpected bursts of joy. She is there next to an antique mahogany table with a carved pineapple at its base that she would feel with her fingers while telling me how fine and valuable it is. The word to describe her spirit is enthusiasm — a wonderful word that comes from *entheos*, "the God within."

If she and I could have celebrated photography's beginnings in our studio by make-believe, we might have played a game of imagining ourselves living inside a *camera obscura.* We might have giggled about standing on our heads in order to appear right side up in the camera, or cut a hole of an exact size in the window shade to make an image both sharp and full of light. (She and I did have one hilarious time, when we opened the door of the studio a crack and peered out into the apartment house hall at a drunken couple having an argument that made no sense. We held our hands over our mouths to muffle our laughter.) In the studio she was quiet, often sad, and when she spoke it was usually about not being married. How could I find her a husband? Where would I look for one? One morning I woke up to hear her sobbing in bed. I did not know what to say or

do, so I closed the studio window, went in the kitchen and squeezed an orange for juice and ate a piece of toast, got dressed in my school uniform, and went quietly out the door to Montgomery Avenue. I followed my usual path along the grass bank by the railroad tracks to Bryn Mawr station, walking slowly because I had enough time to catch the train to Wynnewood and not be late for school. When I think about that morning I do not turn to photographs but to the first four lines of a poem by W. H. Auden about a painting by Pieter Brueghel, of Icarus falling into the sea while others went about their business:

> About suffering they were never wrong,
> The Old Masters: how well they understood
> Its human position; how it takes place
> while someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along… .

There is comfort in the words of a poet who looked at a painting and saw (read) a story of unnoticed pain in a world of people moving as if nothing were amiss. A painter is free to include a whole collection of characters and props at will, to cajole our imaginative minds into building a story, but a photographer has to rely on what is there — facial expressions, bodily stances, a man-made or natural background, and, most of all, the subject's awareness of the photographer. A painting can tell a story. In a photograph, the captured moment contains too small a piece of the narrative.

My mother might have enjoyed our reading of history even more as we arrived at the Italian Renaissance, where, as the scholar Erasmus said in 1517, "splendid talents are stirring." Splendid talents gathered in Italy (where light shines at its best) at a time when rational thought and imagination joined freely with one another, when nature and the miraculous were one. The Italian painter and architect Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) made a box with a hole in one side and a screen opposite. Alberti's may have been a perspective box, or one containing a mirror reflecting a painting, or a box with a sheet of glass between the peephole and the object. And here is Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) drawing light rays as they enter the pinhole of a box. If objects reflect rays of light in all directions, then images can be formed "at any place" by the passage of reflected light rays through a small hole onto a screen, forming "on the opposite wall an inverted image of whatever lies outside."

(Later, the German astronomer Kepler (1571-1630) gave the showbox a name, a *camera obscura,* which could be either a box or a darkened room in a house or shed with a small hole in one wall to allow light to form an image on the opposite wall.)

Then Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576), physician, mathematician and natural philosopher, refers to use of a lens (either a lens or a concave mirror, we are not sure). By then, those who were able to read could use spectacles to improve their failing eyesight. Danielo Barbaro, (1514-1570), architect of Venice, suggests using a convex lens in a show box. A lens with a smaller aperture can make a sharp, clear image. And Giovanni Battista Benedetti (1530-1590), also Venetian, writes about the use of a mirror placed at an angle of 45 degrees to reflect the image onto a surface and let it be upright.

These were "splendid talents" writing about light and images, but the most captivating of all was a lively young Neapolitan named Giovanni Battista della Porta, born in 1535, who wrote in Latin a book called MAGIAE NATURALIS, or NATURAL MAGIC, published when he was twenty-three. His enthusiasm leaps from the pages like light striking a mirror. Drama, natural philosophy, music, alchemy, mathematics, botany, optics — all engaged him. Usually when I read books of history and science I concentrate on facts, and then, briefly, imagine the lives of the people whose work added pieces to our

present. But from a blurred printout of a library microfilm I am reading NATURAL MAGIC and am immersed in the joyous language of this young scientist and playwright who traveled through France and Spain recording scientific and natural history phenomena. Again, if I could travel back in time (and why not take some liberties with time, as photographers do when they hold a moment in place for the eyes of people not even born?) and to Europe, I would take Giovanni Battista della Porta's arm and lead him to Philadelphia to show him the delights of the city, where the windows of tall skyscrapers reflect images of the skyscraper next to them, and the sun, as the earth moves under it, shines on all, and then suggest quietly that he might like to marry my mother. His enthusiasm would have pleased her:

> The Seventeeth Book of Natural Magick: Wherein are propounded Burning-glasses, and the wonderful sights to be seen by them. . . whence great secrets of Nature may appear unto us.
>
> *To see all things in the dark, that are outwardly done in the Sun. . . .*
>
> You must shut all the Chamber windows. . . lest any light breaking in should spoil all. Onely make one hole, that shall be a hands breadth and length; above this fit a little leaden or brass Table, and glew it, so thick as a paper; open a round hole in the middle of it, as great as your little finger: over against this, let there be white walls of paper. . . and what is right will be the left, and all things changed; and the farther they are off from the hole, the greater they will appear. If you bring your paper. . .nearer, they will show less and clearer. . . .
>
> If you put a small centricular Crystal glass to the hole. . .you shall presently see all things clearer. . . with so much pleasure, that those that see it can never enough admire it. But if you will
>
> *See all things greater and clearer*,
>
> Over against it set the Glass, not that which dissipates by dispersing, but which congregates by uniting. . .till you know the true quantity of the Image. . .you shall see as it were an Epitomy of the whole world, and you will much rejoyce to see it. . . .nothing can be more pleasant for great men, and Scholars, and ingenious persons to behold; That in a dark Chamber by white sheets objected, one may see as clearly. . . as if they were before his eyes, Huntings, Banquets, Armies of Enemies, Plays, and all things else that one desireth. . . And no small Arts may be found out.

On that white sheet in the dark Chamber, della Porta imagined a play, in projected images. Pictures in motion.

My wonder now is even greater than it was years ago when I stood in the darkroom hiding my excitement. I study photographs and the partial information they give me, and I read books on photography by a variety of writers. Historian Beaumont Newhall defines photography as "the revelation, interpretation and discovery of the world of man and nature." As a beginning, this definition guides my search for the work of those who love their subjects and want to photograph the truth with an eye for a beautiful picture. But what is the truth, or partial truth, of a moment captured and held in defiance of time? What clues are there, for instance, in the 1933 photograph "Seville, Spain," by Henri Cartier-Bresson, with a boy on crutches in the foreground of a whole crowd of young boys playing in the ruins of a white stucco building? He may be laughing with the other boys or he may be sobbing and fleeing them, I cannot tell which, because his face is in shadow. The boy behind him appears to be trying to hit him and another boy in middle background could have just thrown a rock at him. But it could be a game in which the boy on crutches participates. Laughter, play, or children's cruelty, are framed in a jagged archway formed by a wall from which a whole section has been ripped. Sharp pieces of stone and plaster are all over the ground. On this ruin the children's energy applauds life. I wonder whether the choice of a moment depends on what the photographer has imagined in advance, or on a surprise moment, revealing some expression or effect the photographer doesn't expect, and whether the photographer was willing to be surprised. Did Cartier-

Bresson click his camera over and over in the course of a few minutes to capture this moment by luck? How many pictures does a photographer have to shoot to have one that is worthy of the scene? But Beaumont Newhall writes that Cartier-Bresson's photographs were not accidental. They were records of "previsioned images." Those who called them "accidental" pictures were in error. Newhall writes that Cartier-Bresson "was able to seize the split second when the subject stood revealed in its most significant aspect and most evocative form."

When my mother photographed children she made many shots and clicked often, but that does not mean she was unsure, or seeking pure luck: she had formed a picture in her mind of what she wanted, and she was open to change according to what came before her eyes, so that the latent image she held in her mind was varied by what happened in the play of children in front of her. Perhaps it was the same with Cartier-Bresson in Seville. He knew what he wanted, he watched the children playing inside the arc of ruins and seized "the decisive moment" — perhaps several different moments, knowing in his own mind that after all, luck plays a part.

No one could see in through our studio window because it looked out on the back delivery door of the apartment building. Now and then a truck driver who sat high enough in his cab could see in, but what he saw was not me or my mother but copper strips and rows of photographs mounted on the wall. If the window had been the lens of a *camera obscura* it would have thrown on our wall an image of a corner of the apartment building's brick garage, the asphalt driveway disappearing in a curve around the garage, two trees in the distance. A spare, modern image. We lived in a box with a window-hole. I would like to grab hold of the contemporary photographers Abelardo Morell and Adam Fuss by their collars and take them with me back in time and to the Philadelphia suburbs, asking them politely when we arrive to create more of their gorgeous pictures using my mother's studio as a camera obscura with the window as an aperture for light. The magnificent work of these two artists celebrates photography's original magic. If only our wall could be a subject for an Adam Fuss pinhole photograph, like those he made of classical sculpture in New York's Metropolitan Museum. A circle of light — from a flashlight held in his hand? — gives sudden life and motion to ancient statues waiting quietly in the museum night after night. Fuss could cover our window and cut a pinhole in the cover, then turn his flashlight toward the copper-stripped wall and prepare it to fly on its own through the world of photography, recalling the genius of the Chinese philosopher Mo Ti who in the fifth century B.C. described the pinhole as the "collecting place" for the sun's rays. Then Abelardo Morell could bring the world inside the studio by using our window as the opening in a *camera obscura*. An image of the out-of-doors — the garage corner, the trees and driveway — would appear superimposed on the rows of my mother's photographs, not to disturb them but to insist on contact, on connection to the outside world. The image would land on our wall upside down but I would be pleased by that. Light rays reflected from the objects of the world strike the retina of the eye in the same way. Our eyes receive images upside down and in far less than a split second the brain's power of perception reverses them.

Abelardo Morell and Adam Fuss recall the excitement of the early observers of light and include it with an elegant naturalness into their contemporary photographs. I would ask Mr. Morell how to place a mirror in the studio, not just to reverse the outdoor image, but to find a way — could he? — to send an image of our inside wall out to the world, to project it through the window to something, perhaps a huge outdoor screen like those at the drive-in movie theaters we used to go to. Or perhaps to an empty brick wall somewhere nearby, to add to the Wall Art, the enormous outdoor paintings we see now all

over the city of Philadelphia, at the Locust and 13th Street parking lot where you can leave your car and stand for a few minutes to admire the powerful figures of artists and workers of all races, another at Broad and Lambert Streets, of ballet dancers with lighted city windows behind them, and still another at Walnut and 57th Street, of neighbors savoring flowers, deer, lakes and mountains.

Could you, Mr. Morell, find a way to project my mother's photographs through the pinhole and out into the world? They are beautiful to the eye.

❄

In 1839, in the quiet of his home in England, William Henry Fox Talbot combined science and art in celebration of the everyday world around him.

If my mother had looked at his early photographs she would have relaxed. Beauty in the ordinary, in what is there. A broom leaning against a doorway. But a doorway that is part of a country gentleman's house. She could have explained to my grandmother that, after all, photography was an acceptable choice of endeavor because it had its origins not only in the aristocratic surroundings of a wealthy British family, but also in Paris, the glittering center of true culture.

England or France? In which country should she spend the most time and effort, grooming her divorced daughter for a new marriage? My grandmother could not decide. When I was very small, and she still had some money, she took my mother, myself, and a nanny to England, then to Paris, and back to England, to call on people connected to acquaintances in Philadelphia and introduce my mother to families who might have an unmarried son with a title. My mother took a liking to one young man in London but my grandmother said no and shooed him away. Later he was appointed a member of Winston Churchill's cabinet. In Paris they spoke French well enough to call on friends of friends. They were introduced in a few society gatherings, but no likely suitor appeared for my mother. Perhaps it had to do with the presence of her child.

In England, Fox Talbot invented the fundamental process of photography — that of making a "negative" first, and from the negative, one or more "positive" prints, an idea, as Talbot's friend Sir John Herschel wrote, of "that sublime simplicity on which the mind rests." Perhaps it came to Talbot's mind easily, in company with other ideas, as one person can move unremarkably in a crowd flowing through a city gate. Once inside, the idea — of letting light shine through a negative onto paper to restore light and shadow to their rightful places — stood on the sidelines of nineteenth century industrial ferment and waited for the time when it would become the ground base of photography.

If I had looked at Fox Talbot's photograph "The Open Door" out of context, without having read histories of photography and before borrowing a copy of Talbot's THE PENCIL OF NATURE from photographer Holly Wright, I would have noticed, first and briefly, the broom's harsh, uneven bristles that would make sweeping difficult. As a brooding teenager lifting my eyes occasionally to glance at the world, I would have dutifully looked for lines, how they invite one's eyes to follow them, and curves — some of them whole circles that take you back to where you began. I might even have abandoned my scorn for a few minutes and noticed tones of black, white, and gray, contrasts of light and dark, what the absence of color in a photograph allows you to see, and finally, what is featured. Here is a broom leaning against an open door in perfect line with a slanting shadow. On a second look, the harsh bristles appear almost weightless compared to the heavy wood and rough stone surrounding them. Vines cling to the stone exterior. A bridle hanging in the entrance suggests that this is a stable; a lantern is there, ready for anyone wishing to enter. At the back of the dark room is a faint window light, so

we know that the interior darkness is not total. In THE PENCIL OF NATURE, the book of photographs and text he published in 1844 to present a record of his achievement, Talbot wrote under this picture: "A painter's eye will often be arrested where ordinary people see nothing remarkable."

In the days when I knew nothing about Talbot, I would have looked at another of his photographs, "The Haystack," within the limits of self-comforting memory, thinking of piling up hay at the Putney School summer work camp in Vermont when I was fifteen, feeling again the lightness of lifting hay with both arms in a smooth muscular motion all the way from the ground to the top of the stack, keeping up with the others. That summer I was stunned by the joy I felt, as if I had been freed from something constraining or allowed to jump out of a confinement. How did my mother find out about Putney? None of the girls at school knew anything about it. I told her I would stay home in our studio and find a summer job, but she shook her head about that. She must have asked a friend where a fifteen-year old could go for the summer, but which friend? Who in her world of strait-laced Philadelphians could possibly have known about a camp in Vermont with a huge mural covering one whole wall of the dining room — a 1930s painting of workers banded together, arms raised for glorious cause, singing, marching forward? Perhaps the camp did not cost very much because of all the work we did. We worked every morning. We cleaned the chicken house, weeded rows of vegetables, picked wax beans and green beans, strawberries and blackberries, painted the walls of the school classrooms. A man named Ed Gray taught us how. "Use plenty of paint," he told us, "and stroke it on evenly, straight across or up and down. Don't skimp on the paint." We built a table for the library out of some hard oak. "Let the hammer do the work. Don't push it, feel the weight of it and let the weight fall straight down on the nail." The other campers were from worlds different than mine. There were children of artists and writers, some who lived in New York City or Connecticut. Archibald MacLeish's son came hiking through one day to visit his friends and I stared at him, the son of the poet whose line "A poem should not mean/ But be" our English teacher at school had read to us. She told us we should savor poems and paintings and pieces of music for themselves, as they are. We do not have to find meaning in works of art. One girl at Putney played the guitar and it was then that I heard for the first time the live sound of a guitar string and was captured for life, wanting nothing more than to sit on the side of a Vermont hill and sing (shout) songs by Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie. Some afternoons we bicycled on roads along small rivers where water raced in a shallow rush through rocks and fallen tree limbs, and we parked our bicycles and took turns leaping from rock to rock to cross the river. Once we went to Lake George and canoed over the whole lake, camping for three nights on different parts of the shore. We climbed the trail going up Mount Marcy in the Adirondacks and reached the top one glorious afternoon in a haze of fatigue and sunlight. I had no camera with me, to capture the moment. My mother often said that she had not really seen something unless she had taken a picture of it, but I can see in my mind the trail lined with the roots of trees, can hear the voices of the other campers and feel the climbing weight of my pack and my longing to reach the top, which when it happened was a freedom and arrival like no other. I knew then why people climb mountains.

Fox Talbot's photograph "The Haystack" still has for me the power to call up memory, but now I approach it studiously. The ladder does not appear solidly balanced, and if you were to climb it you could easily fall. Did Talbot deliberately place it against the haystack to create an artistic composition? I try to imagine the world of a landed gentleman scholar of 19th century England, an educated man whose wide-ranging interests included botany, optics, the art of painting and sculpture, who loved words and images,

details and theory, sought knowledge in facts and in possibilities, and saw no conflict among his varied subjects of study. He traced the meanings of words back to Latin and Greek, to Egyptian hieroglyphics and the cuneiform writing of ancient Assyria and Babylon. In a niche in Lacock Abbey, his home and now a museum, he placed a small statue of Diogenes with a lantern. Historian Mike Weaver calls Talbot "Diogenes with a camera," a seeker of truth of all kinds. For Weaver, Talbot's work is full of metaphor: "'The Open Door' is open to all who seek knowledge; the lantern can light the way; the bridle of Stoicism checks the passions that threaten pure reason, and the broom sweeps the threshold of the dark chamber clean."

I am inclined to back away from meaning. Let the photograph "be," I think to myself. Look at its subject, patterns, details. It is a gift from a photographer who has made an arrangement with light to send the picture to our eyes. We are free to accept it, and if we want to find in it symbols and meaning, are we free to do that also? Only, I think, if the photographer intended to include symbols and meaning, and it is our task to determine whether or not the photographer had such an intention. One can read too much into a photograph. But with Talbot's photogenic drawings, it is tempting to find meaning. Talbot's many and varied interests occupied his mind in company, so it is likely that design, shadow, light, composition, and analogies to a search for truth, are all there together in the picture. He allowed the "truth" in his new medium to blend with the requirements of art and at the same time let symbolism roam freely through his photographs, present if observers want to find it.

Talbot had longed to draw on paper the beautiful details of the natural world. But he lacked skill in drawing. He wrote in THE PENCIL OF NATURE:

> "One advantage of the discovery of the Photographic Art will be, that it will enable us to introduce into our pictures a multitude of minute details which add to the truth and reality of the representation, but which no artist would take the trouble to copy faithfully from nature."

The minute details which add to truth and reality. Some artists do not treasure them, but instead sacrifice detail to gain an effect. Other artists use detail pointedly and lovingly, to punctuate, or to gently wound the observer. I am thinking of Rembrandt Peale's painting of his brother, "Rubens Peale With a Geranium," of the geranium leaves resembling veined umbrellas beginning to turn yellow at the edges, one leaf leaning on the flower pot and another fallen to the table. The strongest detail is in the young man's right hand. It rests on the flower pot, one finger on its decorative ridge and two fingers inside the top, the fingers of a true botanist who cannot keep his hand from the soil. We look and we feel with our own hands. Geraniums love water and these are on the edge of thirst.

But that is a human detail. Talbot, as scientist and artist, wanted to capture the details of nature. At Lake Como in Italy, a place so beautiful one longs to hold onto a moment of being there, he used a *camera lucida* — an ingenious instrument invented by William Wollaston that consists of a prism suspended on a brass rod. An artist moves the prism to a magical position where the eye can see an image of the scene in front reflected in the prism and, at the same time, on the drawing paper underneath. The artist's eye fuses the two images. With a pencil he or she can trace the scene on the paper, as long as artist and hand and brass rod hold themselves steady. Talbot lamented his inability to draw. "How charming it would be," he wrote, if he could find a way to fix and hold the images made by the sun through the camera lucida.

When Talbot returned home he began to experiment. He bathed a piece of paper in a solution of sodium chloride — common salt and water. He let the paper dry, then dipped it in a solution of silver nitrate.

The chemicals separated into elements of sodium, chloride, silver, and nitrate.

The molecules of chemical elements are constructed of atoms.

When molecules of these elements combine with one another, they do so in simple multiples of definite proportion, according to atomic weight. (This is the atomic theory put forward by John Dalton in 1803, the product of a moment of genius by another self-taught man, working alone, that set the direction of chemistry for the next hundred years.)

The elements inside the solution on the paper combined again to form new compounds: sodium nitrate and silver chloride.

Talbot placed the paper inside a camera obscura and took it outside where the sun's rays reflected from buildings, haystacks, workmen with ladders, through the glass to the paper at the back of the box. Light rays struck the crystals of silver chloride on the paper and freed the silver from the chlorine. The light-struck crystals let their silver atoms jump free and darken in the light. Those parts of the paper exposed to the brightest light turned darkest.

Then, in a moment of genius, Talbot took the paper out of the camera obscura, oiled it, and used it as a stencil, repeating the process but this time letting light shine through the first image, in which light and dark were reversed, to make on paper a second print that restored light and shadow to their own places.

He kept his invention to himself until early in the year 1839, when he learned to his surprise that in Paris a naturalist painter and stage designer named Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre had announced his own miracle. Talbot knew nothing of Daguerre's work, and nothing of the earlier work of the French printer Nicéphore Niépce, who in 1822 inserted the lens from his microscope into one side of a small camera obscura, and inside, opposite the lens, a sheet of glass coated with a particular kind of bitumen, or asphalt. Light reflected through the lens from the bright parts of the image bleached the bitumen instead of darkening it, and the light did more: it hardened the bitumen under the bright areas to the point where it was insoluble in a mixture of lavender oil and oil of petroleum — in which it would have dissolved had the light not struck it. Niépce had made the first permanent photograph.

In 1829 in Paris, Daguerre and Niépce formed a partnership for the making of pictures "drawn by light."

Daguerre's images were, like Niépce's, direct positives, with light and shadow in the right places. Daguerre spread diluted nitric acid on a sheet of copper plated with silver and exposed it to the vapor of iodine, to let the vapor form a thin coating. Then he placed it in the camera obscura, turned the lens toward the scene he wished to capture, and allowed it to remain still for ten minutes, after which he exposed the copper sheet to vapor of mercury and heated it to a temperature of 167 degrees Fahrenheit. "The drawings came forth as if by enchantment," Beaumont Newhall writes.

Right away Daguerre put his own name on his light drawings. He was a master of showmanship and public relations. The sharp, brilliant image of the daguerreotype, the jeweled likeness and clear details of its subject, made it immediately popular all over Paris and soon in England. This was a wound to Talbot, who loved details and hoped that light and chemicals would draw them for him.

From his notebooks we know that after Daguerre's announcement Talbot went to work experimenting with copper plates, thinking perhaps that Daguerre's way might be

the true path after all. Daguerre's details were clear. In some of Talbot's early work, details are lost in a hazy natural effect of nature that he had not bargained for. The negative called "Leaf with serrated edge," (that historian Larry Schaaf includes in OUT OF THE SHADOWS) is an exception. The lines of a leaf rise in majesty as if to mirror the very tree from which the leaf has fallen, but Talbot has turned the leaf to let it make a diagonal line. I find myself returning to this picture often, looking at it not with my head turned to the side but straight on, relaxed and at home, as Talbot was, with diagonal lines. When I walk in the autumn season I notice leaves fallen to the sidewalk, leaves of every size that I can, if I choose, brush past and ignore as part of the taken-for-granted setting, or hold in view for a few seconds, or, better yet, pick up and study one at a time as a starting place for learning to see.

Talbot preferred quiet country isolation to city publicity. For years he had put off presenting, and securing a patent for, his sun-pictures. Did he decide to wait until he had achieved something close to perfection? Perhaps he was content without publicity, surrounded by family but alone in his thoughts, alone in his workroom, quietly measuring his chemical compounds. But Daguerre's announcement, the chance that his own years of work might be rendered useless — and perhaps a rush of competitive anger fueled by the centuries-old rivalry between England and France — sent Talbot into action, to show his work to the Royal Society in London, and to visit his old friend and fellow scientist Sir John Herschel, whose contribution to photography would be enormous.

For years Talbot and Herschel had shared scientific information with one another, in letters and visits. Herschel knew chemistry. And he was a generous man. In earlier years he had observed that hyposulfite of soda had the property of dissolving silver salts. He showed his friend Talbot the results obtained when he used it to wash his modest sun pictures. This is the "hypo" that photographers use today to fix and hold their images on paper. (Daguerre, when he learned of this method, adopted it immediately for his copper plates.) Herschel offered the name *photography* to replace Talbot's term "photogenic drawing." He named Talbot's reversed image a *negative*, and the second image, in which light and shadow returned home, a *positive*. Sir John was the son of the astronomer William Herschel, whose observation of the stars he continued — out of a sense of duty, some historians say, but Sir John loved all natural philosophy, including the observation and laws of the stars (the "most perfect of sciences," he called it), as much as his father did. It was the frame of his father's forty-foot telescope that he chose to reflect in one of his first photographs. "Light is my first love," he wrote.

Oh, those educated men, permitted by wealth and leisure to pursue knowledge in as many directions as they chose! Not tied to one discipline, but free to let an idea rest for a while in order to follow something altogether different, then return to the earlier interest. Free to combine an old idea with a new one. Herschel writes that the study of natural philosophy ". . .unfetters the mind from prejudices of every kind, and leaves it open. . . to every impression of a higher nature which it is susceptible of receiving, guarding only against enthusiasm and self-deception by a habit of strict investigation, but encouraging, rather than suppressing, every thing that can offer a prospect or a hope beyond the present obscure and unsatisfactory state." Was it a heavy weight for Herschel and Talbot to carry, to be living in an "unsatisfactory state" of knowing much, and knowing how much more they did not know? I imagine them holding back their excitement, whose enormous force might, if let loose, carry them inadvertently into "self-deception." Careful, strict methods of investigation kept them on the multiple paths of truth, but it was their imagination that made those paths compatible.

Both Talbot and his rival Daguerre learned, separately, that they did not have to keep the camera in front of the scene for a long period. The time of exposure to light could be shortened. A "latent image" formed quickly on Daguerre's silver-nitrate covered copper plate, without revealing itself. Talbot changed his own method. He bathed the paper in silver nitrate, then in potassium iodide. The two chemicals combined to form silver iodide. Talbot washed the paper further in a mixture of gallic acid and silver nitrate, to make it highly sensitive to light. After a brief exposure to the image in the camera obscura, the crystals of silver iodide were *prepared* to let the silver atoms free themselves and wait, ready with their latent image, for another treatment. The exposed sheet of paper and copper-silver plate removed from the camera obscura were blank. The image could be developed later — by Daguerre in a vapor of mercury and heat, and by Talbot in gallo-nitrate of silver. In a developer, the latent images in Talbot's negative and in Daguerre's copper-silver positive would appear, each in its own reversed or straightforward glory. A shorter exposure time reduced the exasperated fatigue that could creep into the faces of those posing for a portrait and eliminated the possibility of carriages moving hazily in distortion through a London or a Paris street.

How can an image form and not reveal itself? Talbot had studied crystals of certain chemicals through his microscope but he was a hundred years too early for theories that probe deep inside an atom to describe the action of its electrons and ions.

Sir John Herschel knew that there was action taking place, and that it was beyond men's current knowledge:

"It is not difficult, if we give the reins to imagination, to conceive how attractive and repulsive atoms, bound together by some unknown tie, may form little machines or compound particles. . .and accordingly many ingenious suppositions have been made to that effect: but in the actual state of science it is certainly safest to wave these hypotheses, without however absolutely rejecting them. . . ."

Did Herschel and his friend Talbot speculate often on the subatomic action deep inside the chemicals of the latent image, or did they sigh and place it carefully in the mental storage bin where they kept the "phenomena" of nature, to be studied later?

If only Fox Talbot's pictures had had Daguerre's brilliantly sharp details, and if only daguerreotypes had been made by a timeless method. . . .

My mother told me what Alfred Stieglitz once said to her and to his protégé, photographer Dorothy Norman, when the two women were showing their photographs to each other at Stieglitz's New York City gallery, An American Place, and he was looking on. "Now, Alice, if only you had what *Dorothy* has, and if only Dorothy had what *you* have, then. . . ." When she told me what he had said, I was too young to interpret a comment that now, from a distance, sounds condescending on the part of the dean of American photography. What did Dorothy Norman "have" that my mother did not? Was he talking about their photographs? Norman's work is a worshipful imitation of that of Stieglitz, her mentor. Or did he mean their personalities, their way of publicizing their work? Dorothy Norman was certainly better situated, being part of Stieglitz's working life, but her pictures seem to me cold and unimaginative, except for one, "Rockefeller Center and Church, New York." This picture has a dark strength. An outline of a church roof, powerful in its immobility, punctuated by a small round window of light telling us that this is indeed a church and that it serves as a ground base for the enormous symbol-of-greed Rockefeller Center rising above it. Or do I miss the point? The church is an old shadow, an icon of the past left behind. No, neither of these. I read meaning into the picture that is not intended. The contrast of light and dark, the pattern of the church eaves

against the flat building blocks of early 20th century architecture. Yes, all of these. The photograph sets its observers free to find meaning or not, as we wish. We are at liberty to wonder to ourselves why the photographer chose this particular view. Did Dorothy Norman find Rockefeller Center beautiful or miserably ugly? The church roof outdated, foolishly designed? Or did she stand back and let possibilities enter — the old church as a rock holding us to the ground so that we do not fly off into the arrogant heights of 1920s modern design? I can look and think and misinterpret, I can err without consequence, look again and think about cities all over the world with old churches and new skyscrapers living side by side. Then after a few minutes I stop thinking about meaning and relax, enjoy the pattern, particularly the sharp pointed church steeple rising to an infinitesimal cross that is hard to see unless you look closely for it. That steeple may have been the highest point in the neighborhood until the building of Rockefeller Center.

Alfred Stieglitz was hospitable to my mother. "Here is the lady from Philadelphia," he would say when she arrived at his gallery. She rode the train to New York whenever she could with a portfolio of photographs in hand and made her way to An American Place, to be received as one of many eager-to-be photographers and painters.

On one visit she was the only person there, and Stieglitz, she said, seemed very upset. He handed her an unopened envelope and asked her if she would open it and read the contents aloud to him, as he was unable to do so. It was a letter from Georgia O'Keefe, his wife, who left New York to live and paint in the Southwest. The letter said that she was not coming back to him. My mother read it aloud and sat with him, saying nothing, and he sat silently. Once in 1944 she took me with her to visit Stieglitz and I remember a small room near the front door, dark and crowded with chairs, where I sat close to him and stared at him sideways while he and my mother talked. I had never been that close to a man — except when the doctor looked down my throat, and on the crowded trains to and from Delaware where soldiers crammed the aisles — and I examined very closely the white hairs growing from his ears. Then we stood up and walked into the light of the gallery with its rows of paintings and photographs, and I looked at the seascapes of John Marin while Stieglitz and my mother talked about O'Keefe and the early days when she came to live with him. "She washed her stockings in a small basin, on the floor. . ." I heard him say.

Now I rejoice that my mother had a place to go, away from her studio-box to where there were people to talk to who willingly turned their eyes to her photographs. Stieglitz was generous with his attention and made An American Place a center for young artists. He looked at their work, glanced at it perhaps, trusting his own eye for recognizing talent as one could see in the work of contemporary artists he showed in his gallery — Ansel Adams, Paul Strand, painters John Marin and Arthur Dove. On some visits my mother and Dorothy Norman went out to lunch together. From the way she talked about those visits, I knew she longed for that world (Dorothy Norman grew up in Philadelphia, too, but the lives of the two women did not overlap, except at American Place), and wanted to move to New York to join vibrant artists. She had so little money, how could she afford a studio in New York City? Would she lose contact with her Philadelphia society friends who might look askance at these forays into the art world? She was shy, without confidence, not eager to take risks or able to push herself forward. But the dream of a different life gave her enough courage to go to Stieglitz and introduce herself.

If only she had ambition, or at least something like Talbot's kind of anger at being outdone by the Frenchman Daguerre, and with that, something like Daguerre's outgoing personality, his city life and love of attention. She would have promoted her work beyond the confines of the Philadelphia Art Alliance and the Bryn Mawr Art Center. "If I moved

to New York, where would we live? Where would my daughter go to school?" she wondered out loud. In New York she might find colleagues who could talk about light filters and tones of shadow. It would be fun, I thought, to live in New York.

I find her again, in Richard Whalen's ALFRED STIEGLITZ: A BIOGRAPHY , ". . .he had an exceptionally strong need to dominate and to control everyone around him, especially women. Earlier that year he had spoken to Seligmann of an 'unidentified woman, like many others, who had utter faith in him.' Stieglitz continued, 'Such innocence is ghastly. She is like a somnambulist. Anything I tell her she would do. But a fine relationship is dependent upon such utter confidence. She feels I would not ask her to do anything unless it was the thing to do.'"

He was speaking of my mother, I know this. I know it absolutely. She went to visit the master and he told her what to do, and of course she listened and obeyed. So eager for an education, her mind open and hungry, she longed to know things, to understand how to practice an art that seemed more comfortable than playing the violin under the critical ear of a European master while knowing that the sound she made was not pleasing him. She wanted to please another human being. No husband, her father and brother dead, a sister wrapped in her own family, and a mother impossible to please. She was as Stieglitz describes, trusting in those who knew more than she. No wonder he was so cordial to her, so pleased to spend an hour with us. They had a "fine relationship," my mother and Stieglitz, because she listened and worshiped, her "ghastly innocence" turned directly toward him in adoration. And I am sure Stieglitz would have said that her photographs were beautiful because he told her how to make them and without him she would have done nothing. Henry J. Seligmann writes that Stieglitz's "Pygmalion complex was so powerful an element of his psychological makeup that it extended to men as well as to women." It is with a degree of incredulity and revulsion that one reads Seligmann's summary of remarks the photographer made in the spring of 1927: "'Neither Marin's nor O'Keeffe's work would have existed without Stieglitz. Marin would have been making pleasant etchings, nice little water colors. O'Keeffe's work would not have existed at all. So the question was, was not their work also an expression of Stieglitz?' Such appalling egotism could only lead to trouble with O'Keeffe."

My mother's enthusiasm lighted her face and embarrassed my brooding teenage self when she jumped up and down with the children she was photographing, or when she greeted a friend. When she smiled she covered herself with an innocence and joy that was almost childlike. At home in the studio she was quiet, talking about wanting to be married and have a home. Wasn't the studio a home? I guess not. Home meant having a husband and a dining room where she could give dinner parties and invite Philadelphians, carefully choosing each group because, as she told me later, it was important to invite people together who lived on the same side of the Schuylkill River, either the Main Line side or the Chestnut Hill side, who would be congenial. If you gave a party and brought together people from opposite sides of the river, it didn't always work. One of her society friends must have told her that, and she took it to heart. She believed what people told her. The words of others stayed with her, she believed them because those who spoke them were out in the world, and she was not, she thought, and therefore they must know.

"Harry Truman is just a little haberdasher!" she said one evening when we were walking to the tearoom, next to Harcum Junior College, where we ate supper once a week. Someone had told her that. I was too young to contradict, but I suspected that this statement might not be accurate. I wanted her to be part of the world and know the truth, and at the same time to have the "basic things," as she called them, meaning a husband, a

house, and social gatherings. She longed for the life of a working artist, the warmth of a proper home, people to talk with about photography, people coming to dinner, freedom to move about with her camera. Did she believe that because she had so little education she could not learn? Her year at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia made her think that she could not draw, so when she saw in the front window of a studio shop in Wayne a man with a black cloth over his head leaning toward a camera balanced on a tripod, she went into the shop and without hesitation asked the man if he would teach her how to make photographs. An instant, a moment, in which she found a way to fill her bright mind. She could choose where to stand and what to let into the camera to fill the empty spaces left by a broken path through school. Photography was a way to educate oneself, to gather facts by seeing.

In her darkroom she showed her knowledge — how many minutes to leave the exposed film in its developer, how long to wash it, how long to let the light shine through the negative onto the paper, and how to count the time the exposed paper lay basking in its own developer. And she had a way with mechanical things. She seemed to know, without knowing, how things work. When she applied for the job in the war-time factory, she told the interviewers that she had no mathematics, no training in radio equipment, but that she had "an instinct and a careful way," and they hired her and it turned out that she did. She concentrated, followed instructions exactly, knowing that a mistake might mean the failure of an airplane and the loss of the life of a brave pilot. Would she have been a better worker if she had understood the science of radio waves, or a better photographer if she had studied scientific theory on the attraction of negative and positive ions inside the atoms inside the molecules of chemical compounds? Probably not. I am imposing, years later, on her world, by thinking what fun it would have been if she had known, even joked, about the changing movement of minuscule unseen particles as we stood in the darkroom watching an image appear on paper in its watery bath.

Now I want to tell her what I am reading. And I want to tell her something else: that she belonged to an extraordinary art whose participants were men and a few women who in their own minds were leaping up and down with joyous wonder at the pictures their cameras and chemicals made possible. She was in the field with all of them, doing what they were doing. Would such words have eased her loneliness? Perhaps. That I think she lacked fun in her work because she didn't have the information that I am acquiring now, very late, is to think that fun for her would have been knowing intricate facts and scientific theories. Again, I impose on her. She loved her work. She was an artist. But wouldn't we have had fun, in the studio, if we could have laughed about negative electrons jumping away, freeing themselves from what held them back! Let's *us* jump free, go to New York, maybe. Get ourselves ready for a different life?

No, not likely. If she had been educated she might not have done what she did. She found a way to let facts and beauty enter her mind through the camera. And she did have fun, I know that now. The work in the dark studio never lost its magic for her.

So it is for myself, not for her, that I read about the latent image, because I believed it important to know how things work.

Most science writers write for other scientists in prose that reveals their own mastery of the subject. J. Gordon Cook writes for laypersons like myself. In WE LIVE BY THE SUN, Cook explains the theory of the latent image published in 1938 by two scientists, R. W. Gurney and N. F. Mott — a theory that has been examined and questioned in the years since and remains a solid possibility. Reading about the action of light on chemicals lets me imagine in retrospect not only the surface of our darkroom time, and my tangled

teenage annoyance and wonder, but also the unseen interior, the deeply magical behavior of atoms from the moment the camera allows light to strike them.

Molecules consist of one or more atoms. Within atoms, there are electrically charged particles. An electron is a particle with a negative charge.

An ion is an electrically charged atom. A positive ion has lost an electron. A negative ion has gained an electron.

A silver halide is a chemical compound of silver and a halogen, one of the non-metallic elements such as iodine, chlorine and bromine.

Inside a crystal of silver iodide, the silver atoms and the iodine atoms are in a state of chemical combination. To combine with one another, a silver atom gives up one of its electrons to a iodine atom. When a silver atom gives up an electron, it is left with a positive charge. At the same time, each iodine atom has acquired an extra negative electron. A positive atom and a negative atom join one another, in chemical combination. Together they form a neutral molecule of silver iodide.

In order to be set free from its ties to iodine in the silver iodide crystal, the positive silver ion must be provided with an electron, a negative charge. This would restore a neutral independence to the silver ion.

When light enters a camera and strikes silver iodide crystals (briefly, in short exposure time), the light frees electrons from the iodide ions. An iodide ion that loses an electron is converted back to a neutral iodine atom. The free electrons move about inside the crystal and are attracted to sensitivity specks on the crystal's surface, where they gather and set up negatively charged centers. The positively charged silver ions, free of their attraction to iodine, move up to the centers, combine with the electrons, and form neutral atoms of silver. The silver on the crystal surfaces forms a latent image, lying in wait, ready to be brought out by the developer.

The Gurney-Mott theory of the latent image was published almost a hundred years after the time Fox Talbot worked quietly in his country studio and read the science literature of his day. On the surface Talbot seems a reclusive man — unlike Daguerre, whose brilliant images startled but whose method did not last — but his mind did not rest often, and he changed forever the way humans look at the world. From Talbot's notebooks we learn of his tireless search for answers to how Nature creates its own image. Some say that Talbot's approach to science was not as methodical as that of his friend Herschel, who not only invented hypo and the name "photography"but also introduced Talbot to the idea of making negatives on glass.

When Herschel showed Talbot how to spread a silver halide on a large piece of glass and have it adhere to the surface, Herschel called this method "a step of improvement," to which Talbot answered, "The step of a giant!"

Notes:
p. 21: "when the oar handle is down, the blade is up", from John H. Hammond, THE CAMERA OBSCURA, page 2.

p. 21: a "curved ornament of rock crystal," flat on one side, rounded on the other, and probably used to magnify the objects seen through it, from J. Gordon Cook, WE LIVE BY THE SUN, p. 146.

p. 26: A painter's eye will often be arrested. . . .", from William Henry Fox Talbot, THE PENCIL OF NATURE, p. 33.

p. 28: "The drawings came forth as if by enchantment", from Beaumont Newhall, THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY…, p. 21.

p. 29: The negative called "Leaf with serrated edge", from Larry Schaaf, OUT OF THE SHADOWS , p. 26.

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from

TRISTIA

Osip Mandelshtam

tr. from the Russian by Kevin Kinsella

I.
I am cold. Transparent Spring
Wraps Petropolis in its green feathers.
But like jellyfish,
The Neva's waves sicken me.
Along the river's north bank
Cars flash their headlights,
Dragonflies and steel beetles fly,
And stars flash their golden pins.
But no star will ever kill
The waves' heavy emerald.

II.
We will die in transparent Petropolis,
Where Prosperpina rules over us.
With each breath we taste death's air.
Each hour celebrates our death.
Harsh Athena, goddess of the sea,
Cast off your helmet of stone.
We will die in transparent Petropolis
Where Proserpina reigns, not you.

Tristia

I have studied the science of parting
In the bareheaded laments of night.
Oxen chew, the waiting drags on
As the vigil stretches the night's last hour.
I honored the ritual of the crowing night
When I took up the traveler's heavy grief.
I saw in a woman's distant eyes
Tears mingling with the muses' song.

Who can tell from the word *parting*
What kind of separation lies before us,
What awaits us in the rooster's call
When a fire burns in the acropolis?
And at the dawn of a new life,
While the oxen chew lazily in the barn,
Why the rooster, herald of the new day,
Beats its wings on the city wall?

I love the routine of spinning wool,
The shuttle's glide, the spindle's hum.
Look, drifting towards us like swan's down,
Barefoot Delia comes flying!
How poor the foundation of our lives,
How plain the language of joy!
Everything has come before and will again,
But only the moment of recognition is sweet.

So be it: a transparent shape
Lies on a clean, earthen dish
like the stretched hide of a squirrel.
A girl, bending over the wax, reads it.
It is not ours to tell the future of Greek Erebus:
Wax is for women as bronze is for men.
Our lot is to fall in battle,
Their's to die by prophecy.

The Tortoise

On the rocky spurs of Pierius
The Muses led the first dance,
So blind lyrists, like bees,
Could give us gifts of Ionian Honey.
A cold, lofty wind began to blow
From a girl's prominent forehead
So that distant grandsons might discover
The tender coffins of the Archipelago.

Spring dashes in to trample Hellas' meadow,
Sappho puts on a motley shoe,
And the hammering cicadas
Forge a little ring, just like in the song.
The sturdy carpenter has built a tall house.
The chickens have all been strangled for the wedding.
And the clumsy cobbler has stretched
All five of his ox hides into shoes.

The slow tortoise-lyre
Barely, just barely creeping along,
Plunks itself down in the sunshine of Epirus,
Quietly warming its golden belly.
Who will caress it now?
While it sleeps, who will turn it over?
Forseeing the touch of dry fingers,
It waits for Terpander.

The oaks are watered from a cold, earthen pot.
The bareheaded grass rustles.
The honeysuckles smell sweet to the wasps.
Oh, where are you sacred islands,
Where no one eats broken bread,
Where there is only honey, wine, and milk,
Where grinding labor does not cloud the sky,
And the wheel turns easily?

Swallow

I forgot the word I wanted to say.
The blind swallow flies back to her hall of shadows
On clipped wings, to play with the transparent ones.
A night song is sung in forgetfulness.

Birds are not heard. Immortelles are not blossoming.
There is a herd of nightmares with transparent manes.
Among the grasshoppers, the word is forgotten

And slowly grows like a tent or a temple,
And suddenly falls on its side like wild Antigone
Or falls at the feet, like a dead swallow
With Stygian tenderness and a green twig.

Oh, if I could give back the shame of divining fingers
And the great joy of recognition!
I am afraid of the Aonides weeping,
Of mist, chimes, and the void.

But the dark power to love and to recognize
Is for mortals, the sound spills in rings around their fingers.
But I forgot what I wanted to say
And the thought flies back to the hall of shadows.

Always, the transparent one repeats the wrong thing.
Always, swallow, friend, Antigone. . .
But on the lips, like black ice,
Burns the memory of Stygian chimes.

When Psyche-Life follows Persephone
Into the shadows of the transparent forest,
A blind swallow throws itself at her feet
With Stygian tenderness and a green twig.

A crowd of shades hurry forth
To greet their new companion with laments,
Wringing their weak hands before her
In shy and astonished hope.

One carries a mirror, another perfume—
The soul, after all, is a woman and enjoys trifles.
The dry laments, the transparent voices
Fall in a drizzle upon the leafless woods.

The soul does not recognize the transparent oaks.
In a gentle daze of confusion
She breathes on the mirror, not wanting to trade
Her copper token for the misty crossing.

Because I could not restrain your hands,
Because I betrayed your tender, salty lips,
I must await morning in the dense acropolis.
How I hate these ancient weeping willows.

Achaian men outfit their horses in the dark.
With rough saws they cut deeply into the walls.
The blood's dry frolicking will not subside.
And for you there is no name, no sound, no mold.

How bold to think you would return!
Why was I cut off from you so soon?
The gloom still hasn't lifted. The cock hasn't crowed.
The burning axe has yet to cut the wood.

Resin seeps through the walls like a transparent tear
And the city feels its wooden ribs,
But blood flooded the staircase and set off on attack
And thrice the men dreamed of the seductive figure.

Where is sweet Troy? Where is the king's, the maiden's home?
Priam's starling coop will be destroyed.
Arrows will fall like a wooden rain
And then sprout from the earth like a hazel grove.

The last star's sting is painlessly extinguished.
A gray swallow will scratch at the window
And slow day will rise like an ox in the straw
Awakened from a long sleep in the haystack.

from

THE LITTLE GIRL WHO WAS TOO FOND OF MATCHES

Gaétan Soucy

tr. from the French by Sheila Fischman

We had to take the universe in hand, my brother and I, for one morning just before dawn papa gave up the ghost without a by-your-leave. His mortal remains strained from an anguish of which only the bark remained, his decrees so suddenly turned to dust — everything was lying in state in the bedroom upstairs from which just the day before papa had controlled everything. We needed orders, my brother and I, so as not to crumble into little pieces, they were our mortar. Without papa we didn't know how to do anything. On our own we could scarcely hesitate, exist, fear, suffer.

Actually, lying in state isn't the proper term, if such a thing exists. My brother was the first one up and it was he who certified the event for, as the secretarious that day, I was entitled to take my time getting out of my grassy bed after a night beneath the stars, and no sooner had I taken my seat at the table in front of the book of spells than down the stairs came kid brother. It had been agreed that we were to knock before entering father's bedroom and that, after knocking, we were to wait till father authorized us to enter, as we were forbidden to surprise him during his exercises.

"I knocked on the door," said brother, "and father didn't answer. I waited until ... until. . . ." From his fob pocket brother took a watch that had lost its hands in days of yore. ". . . until right away, that's it, until exactly right away, and there was still no sign of him."

He kept staring at his blank-faced watch as if he didn't dare look at anything else and I could see fear, fear and astonishment, rising in his face like water in a wineskin. As for me, I had just inscribed the date at the top of the page, the ink was still wet, and I said:

"That's very troubling. But let's consult the scroll and then we'll see."

We scrutinized the twelve articles of the good housekeeping code of behaviour, it's a very pretty document that goes back centuries or more and it has big initial letters and illuminations if I only knew what that means, but of articles that suggested a relationship, even a remote one, with our situation saw I none. I returned the scroll to its dusty box and the box to its cupboard and I said to my brother:

"Go inside! Open the door and go inside! It's possible that father is defunct. But it's also possible that it's only a stoppit."

A long silence. We could hear nothing but the creaking of wood in the walls, because in the kitchen of our earthly abode the wood in the walls is always creaking. Brother shrugged his shoulders and shook his big head.

"What does it all mean? I don't understand it at all." Then he wagged his finger at me ominously: "You listen carefully now. I'll go up but I warn you, if papa is defunct . . . do you understand? If papa is defunct . . ." He went no further. He turned his face away like a dog when it gives up.

"Don't worry," I said. "We'll face the music, you know."

And brother took the plunge. And that was how he learned that papa's door wasn't locked. We knew of course that it wasn't, wasn't locked that is, when we went inside. But if father were on his feet before us, assuming that a being like him slept through the night, he should, we thought, unlock the door when we woke up, for our convenience. Nonetheless, it was revealed to my brother that morning that Father must have slept like that because he was naked, his tongue was sticking out and, moreover, he hadn't locked his door. For it was hard to see why, if he hadn't slept through the night and had been faithful to his habits, he should have taken the trouble of stripping bare to expire. Which meant that he must have slept, and slept naked, and that he must have died in those trappings with no solution of continuity, or so I reasoned.

Brother came up to me, pale as bone. "He's all white," he said. "White," I replied. "What do you mean? What kind of white! Snow white?" Because with papa you had to be ready for anything. Brother thought it over. "You know that pen on the other side of the vegetable garden, not the kennel on the right, the one behind the woodshed. You see what I mean?" "Yes," I said, "on the other side of the chapel, is that what you're getting at?" "If you sprint down the gentle slope behind it, you come to the dried-up stream." All that was quite correct. "And can you picture the stones that are piled up there!" I

pictured them. "Well, father is white like them. Exactly that white." "Meaning he's somewhat blue, then," I said, "bluish white." "Yes, that's what he is, bluish white." I inquired about his moustache, what it looked like. My brother gave me a look like an animal that's being beaten and doesn't understand why. "Did papa wear a moustache?" "Yes," I said, "the moustache he asked us to brush once a week." "Father never asked me to brush any moustache." Ah la la. My brother is an abysmal hypocrite, I don't know if I thought to write that down. He sat at the table, haggard, his knees quaking, as if he were about to faint away for a trip to paradise.

"But is he breathing" I inquired.

Papa had a way of breathing that left no room for doubt. Even when he had a stoppit and was no more animated than a coat-hook, even when his gaze appeared to be frozen forever, you had only to look at his chest — which started out flat, then swelled up like our only toy the frog, achieved a volume you might have thought to be the belly of a dead horse, then took jerky little pauses as it deflated — to know that papa was still of this world, despite the stoppit.

In response to my question, brother shook his head. "Then he's dead," I said. And repeated myself, something I don't often do: "Then he's dead." What was strange was that when I uttered those words, nothing happened. The state of the universe was no worse than usual. Sleeping the same old sleep, everything continued to wear down as if nothing were amiss.

I went over to the window. A thoroughly singular way of starting the day on the wrong foot. This one looked as if it would be rainy, that was our daily bread around here, unless it snowed. Beneath the lowering sky the fields stretched out, mean and poorly maintained. I can still hear myself saying:

"We have to do something. Actually I think we'll have to bury him."

My brother, whose elbows were on the table, dissolved into sobs with a roisterous sound, like when you burst out laughing with your mouth full. I pounded the table, outraged. Abruptly, brother stopped, as if he'd surprised himself. He sat there with his lips pursed, sucking air and blinking, and his face was as red as the time he bit into one of papa's hot peppers.

He came and stood next to me with his face pressed against the windowpane, an old habit of his, indeed that's why the window was so dirty about six feet from the floor.

His breath left mist on the window, as will anyone's who hasn't expired. "If we're going to bury him," he said, "we may as well do it right away, before it rains. It wouldn't be fitting to inter papa in the mud." From the back of the meadow, horse was coming towards us, his belly low, his nose bobbing gently.

"But we have to make him a shroud beforehand, we can't bury papa like that!" And I said over and over, whispering plaintively and striking my forehead slowly against the window frame: "A shroud, a shroud . . ."

Then I went to the door. My brother asked where I was going.

"To the woodshed."

He didn't understand. Look for a shroud in the woodshed?

"I want to see how we're fixed for planks. You," I added, "go and write down what's just happened."

Immediately, the moans and groans of a spoiled brat.

"You're supposed to be the secretarious today!"

"I couldn't come up with the words."

"Words, words! What words!"

Now look, I'd be ready to set fire to the curtains if words ever failed me, but I was pretending not to care in order to force brother to assume, even slightly, the role of scribbler. But brother is a hypocrite or I don't know anything. To cut short the discussion I grabbed the nail jar with mulish determination, my teeth clenched and my brow furrowed, which must surely have reminded him of father, and that made an impression, I believe.

I trotted down the front steps, careful not to set my heels on the rottenest ones, and headed for the woodshed, as promised. The earth was damp, with a smell of mud and roots that stayed in the head the way bad dreams do when I have them. Vapour came out of my mouth, just like that, as if it had nothing to do with me. The countryside was endless and grey and the pine grove that blocked the horizon was the colour of the boiled spinach that was father's usual breakfast. The village was on the other side, apparently, as were the seven seas and the wonders of the world.

I stopped just next to horse. He too was motionless, watching me. He was so old, so tired, that his round eyes weren't even the same brown colour any more. I don't know whether, elsewhere on earth, there are horses with eyes as blue as those of the valiant

knights whose pictures adorn my favourite dictionaries but, well, we're not put here on this earth to get answers, or so it seems. I went closer and put a whack on his nose in memory of father. The animal recoiled, then lowered his huge face. Again I went closer, I patted his rump, I'm not vindictive. Besides, papa and all that, it wasn't his fault, after all. Perhaps I wrote the word animal somewhat rashly, too.

The rust-coloured gum on the woodshed floor was a result of the sawdust and the rain that wells up from the ground and will never end. I hated stepping in it with my boots; it felt as if the earth were clinging to me, sucking me down towards its belly, which is actually a mouth like that of an octopus, and it sucks you in too, like music. It had been a short while, let's say a few days, since I'd been here. A crust of droppings covered the reaper, scrap iron littered the ground all entangled, the plough no longer knew what the hind end of an ox looked like. As for the Fair Punishment, it was in its corner, gathered into its little heap. It hadn't changed much in recent years, and we moved it around very cautiously, trembling when we took it out of its box. It was as if it had attained its maximum degree of distraughtness, and what was left of it wouldn't dilapidate any more, word of honour, it wouldn't move from here for all eternity. Sometimes I would hold it in my arms for days at a time before I put it away. It's quite something, the Fair Punishment, it will surprise the world one day. Inside there was also the glass box, which I'll talk about again in the proper place at the proper time, we can't avoid it. I said here because it's the woodshed, also known as the vault, where I've hidden away to flee the disaster and to write my last will and testament, which you are reading now. I'll be found when I'm found. Unless I run away somewhere else.

Some warped planks were leaning against the back wall, itself made of wood that expected nothing more from anyone. The rest of the enclosure was made of stones oozing moisture. None of the planks seemed usable to me. Don't expect me to make a grave box for papa out of that! Sitting on a flitch I at least made a sort of cross that might do the trick, even if the two planks didn't really rhyme, they were crossed like eyes. I stopped for a few moments to meditate on what we would inscribe on the cross, or whether it would be better to forget about that. What exactly is a flitch?

In spite of my recent bereftment I allowed myself a smile of complicity with myself as I glanced at the picture of the valiant knight who was my favourite, which I'd placed on one of the corners of the plough so I could come here and admire it in silence

and in private those times when my brother left me alone and was somewhere on the estate playing with himself. The picture, which I'd torn out of a dictionary, made me think about my favourite story, and since it was my favourite picture I'd put them both together in the secrecy of my imagination. The story must have taken place in the real world somewhere, sometime, you see. In it there was a princess in a tower, prisoner of what you call a mad monk, and there was the handsome knight who came and saved her and carried her off on a steed whose wings were made of glowing coals, if I understood correctly. I could read that story without ever tiring of it, often I projected it inside my bonnet, with so much emotion that I wasn't sure whether I myself was the knight or the princess or the shadow of the tower, or just part of the background for their love, like the grass at the foot of the castle keep, or the smell of wild roses, or the dew-speckled coverlet in which the knight wrapped the transfixed body of his beloved, that's what you call that person. Sometimes, even as I was reading other dictionaries to improve myself, I would realize that instead of reading the ethics of spinoza which I had in hand, I was rereading from the dictionary of my head this story about the princess rescued by her knight which is my very favourite. I'd even gone so far as to try reading it to my brother at night before we fell asleep, but he, as you can imagine, would soon snore like a pig. Everything about my brother disappoints, always, with him dreams are impossible.

And I brought it all back with me, I mean the two planks and also a spade, back to the kitchen of our earthly abode.

Brother hadn't stirred from his chair, he was part of the landscape as they say. He was staring straight ahead, idiotically is the word for it, at the apple core that for three weeks had been hanging on a thread tied to the beam up above, that we'd made a game of eating with our hands crossed behind our backs, it's a sport at which I shine. Every so often brother would blow abstractedly on what was left of the mummified fruit, as dry as a grasshopper carcass, to make it swing. He hadn't scribbled what one might call a single line in the book of spells. You can't leave him on his own.

"There are no respectable planks," I said. "I'll have to fetch a coffin from the village, but in any case here's a cross."

Horse had followed me and he was watching us through the window. Just like him.

"Are there any cents left?"

I don't know what it was about my words but they weren't entering my brother's head. Village, coffin, cents — those uncommon words turned his understanding inside out. He would start to make some movement, abort it, begin to get to his feet, then sit down again. He reminded me of our former dog when papa had made him eat mothballs with his daily bread, I mean during the first hour afterwards .

God knows why the thought came to me then that, if father could have foreseen such a thing, he would have liked to take some familiar objects with him beneath the earth. Beginning with brother and me, I mused, but that prospect struck me as excessive and distressing. Our turn would come, of course, our turn to expire, and maybe it would be on the same day or close to it, whenever it is extremely uncted if you can say such a thing. For papa's turn, which seemed to have always existed on the horizon, somewhere we had never figured out, represented a kind of command, an appeal issued, if I dare put it this way, from the womb of the earth, just as heretofore all his orders had issued from the bedroom upstairs. I'm telling it the way it seems to me. But that could wait, I mean our turn, for a few days at least, and maybe for weeks or even centuries, for while we knew from a reliable source, through my father, that we were mortal to the core and that nothing here below would endure, papa had never specified how long it would take for our mortal existence to end and for us, for my brother and me, to pass as corpses from the state of apprentice to that of companion.

I opened the cupboard and checked the contents of the purse, emptying it onto the table. There were a dozen identical coins made of some dull metal and they rolled this way and that. I flattened one with my palm. They rolled isn't exactly correct because in fact it rolled — the dozen, that is — like one man, but too bad, I learned my syntax from the duc de saint-simon, not counting my father. There's still something wrong. I'm always confusing my singulars and my plurals, a real salmonagundi. A cat couldn't find his tail in it.

"Do you think there's enough for us to buy papa a pine suit?"

The pine suit was a joke from father, who didn't churn them out by the myriad but used them in the stories he would sometimes relate to us about those who had died during the days of his youth when he was a fine-looking lad. My brother didn't know any better than I did whether we had enough cents, because father never took us with him

when he went to the village with horse to buy provisions. He always came back fished off. We didn't like that, he'd distribute whacks.

"He should have taught us the value of money," said my brother.

"These are cents," I retorted. "Our cents must have the same value as those of the villagers."

I neglected to mention it, but of the two of us I'm the more intelligent. My arguments strike like cudgel blows. If my brother were writing these lines, the poverty of thinking would leap to your face and no one would understand a word.

"But we may need a lot more. When papa left he always took along a pouch packed with cents. He had a lot and I think he used to go somewhere now and then to stock up."

"Where is that pouch?" I asked.

But my brother kept repeating: "He should have taught us the value of money." On those few occasions when he's visited by an idea, it doesn't leave his bonnet easily.

I forced him to lend me a hand and we searched the cupboard from head to toe. It contained nothing but rags, crucifixes, and papa's priest clothes from when he was a fine-looking lad, along with the stories of saints from which papa had taught us to read, and which he required us to reread, to transcribe ever since childhood, every day or almost. They had pictures of people with soft beards who went around in sandals in sunlit deserts with vines and palm trees, amid scents of jasmine and sandalwood that almost wafted from the pages of the books. It was papa who had written them, in that microscopic script that today is mine, is ours. He had pasted in the illustrations himself, after he'd wet them with his long ox-tongue, I remember seeing him do it. Many of the stories that were given to us that way were only imperfectly intelligible, though, if that's the right word. They were set in judea, which is in japan or in some unfathomable lands where we assumed father had lived before we were put upon the earth, here in this landscape. In fact we believed for a long time that the stories were his and that he wanted to bequeath them to us as a memory to protect us from disease. If you supposed only that, father would have been capable of doing miraculous things — causing water to gush from a rock, turning beggars into trees, making mice out of stones, and who knows what. But why would he have left those enchanted lands and withdrawn into the empty space of this barren, cloudy countryside that's frozen for six months of the year and has neither

olive trees nor sheep? With his sole source of entertainment, his only company, his two thin, daydreamy sons? No, in time that notion came to seem barely plausible. There was also the library, but that I'll talk about later, with its dictionaries of chivalry and its poisons.

"I wonder if father would let us have used these coins," said my brother all at once.

"Would have let us use them," I corrected.

"Same difference. Maybe papa wouldn't have liked it."

"Papa is dead," I said.

"Maybe we should bury them along with."

I rested the spade against the stove and sat at the table, turning the coins over and over in my fingers and shaking my leg. I always shake my foot when I'm angry, it keeps me from using it on the backside of you know who.

FOUR POEMS

Benjamin Gantcher

Hawthorn

I. Snow

The wind trims the drifts up
the reveals like jibs
taut with glass, pounds up steps like breakers,
locks ice,
basements sink with freight.
We make the park and drop like ballast.

Backstroke on a shore.
The swell held,
the pelting uprush, smash and fleck.

Next day the wind's subtraction
leaves cumuli
in the forged hawthorn.

Thaw

Unmuffled, fanning in the startled air,
my nerves tune in to the plinking runoff.
The tree, the snagged tufts model the sky

while under the blanket
bunched homes kneel,
brown dress, black trim, repetitious like shells.

Evening seeps over the spire.
The foragers muscle up stoops,
plump with mineral binge,
clamp to sofas, produce
the flying geometries, the nacre,
the effluvial notes, the uncorked sea.

II. If, Then

Robins swarm the hawthorn pre-spring,
scarfing berries—
orange flags and blips
flash in the haywire clock.

The evacuated trees
stiffen in their sockets
like dried-out gills.
Tongues of salt,

residue of fever,
stain the road bed.
Cars huddle up head-to-tail
in the hurting light.

———————

Tender-leather pre-green wrapped new leaves
prefurl on the hawthorn,
hazing its court script of nails
in a yellow—

tentative generation,
prompted by wary syntax,
murmurs and fuzzes points.
Robins strut around the trunk.

Swamp Laurel

If I think
I'm like the swamp laurel,
slim pole in the bank
of the slip of a river,

barely hefting its spear heads
minted green
in the sun-dollop
and dropping a scrawny shade

in the larger rocking
tree splash. Split once
and twice and twinned
in muddy bronze,

sapling vouchsafes sapling—
despite the hundred bugs
puckering the skin,
the water-based laurel,

coherent like a slick
that bleeds into gleam and splotch,
blurring the bottom,
is (at a middle depth) certain

like a mind beside itself
growing in a dirt
it cannot touch,
anchored in motion.

Summer House

The cedar shingle has kept the straw
and cornsilk even after seven winters.
Weatherproof, tight and sore, a skin
of sheared chips, the sea in the wood.
Chimney-brush pine scrub it and pitch
drips off like ink, painting the grass
and soaking into the sandy hill.

The glowing off the oiled maple
and ochre cement does flatter the moon
and bother the trees, which twist away.
The house moves in.

Pictures don't punch open the ground floor
and nooks up the stair that repeat
and gather in the great room.
Wicker and fibre and clay collect on the horizontal
backs of built-in seats and sills and range.
The stepped bricks of the Aztec fireplace
become shelves. Up the south face live the antique
letter-type tribe. They guard the mini landscape
dabbed on a block. Even the unlettered
pots speak the code.

Hold the Door

Gentle man, tied to the moon
and deer for coasting through brambles
caught by nothing there,
bur, burden, stirred lover who thinks Yes, lamped
in the happenstance glow
you bounce us, turn puddle eye to, ears alert
ahead because you're passing
and the woods you know can scare you.

Cigarettes and tilting the chin
at weather don't moor you, cradled on your back like a plea
or sacrifice to the not yet,
skiffing out on the wind of appetite you're stuck looking into,
brain-plate absorbing our beam, shipping the dumb fact
we are to the question, like a wedge.

Watch us and forget,
come back and watch us.

Syria: The Third Party Is Always Watching

Gretchen McCullough

Samuel watches from the balcony. As I stroll near the gate of his white, shabby villa, I feel him inch closer to the edge of his upstairs balcony. A half glass of straight Scotch rests near his chair; his throat is raw, but he swills the rest. He grabs the bottle and pours himself another swig. His wife, Miriam, will shout at him later when he is drunk, but he doesn't care. He gapes, as if he is watching a blonde Russian stripper in a leopard skin bikini bare her sensuous breasts at one of the downtown dives. After he imagines she has flung away the last shred of her skimpy outfit, she moons him with her fleshy haunches outside the gate to his villa.

Voom! Snap to me, in my careful clothes, black jeans and long-sleeved jacket, no flesh visible. Samuel, cool enough, has tossed modesty into the breeze: he is wearing a white cotton muscle shirt and boxers. His bulging belly touches the railing of the balcony as he peers over for one more peek before I go inside. I pull out my key and open the heavy metal gate, meant to keep out intruders. He calls out, "Helloooo," as if he is on a ship. "Hello," I call from below. Because Karim, my lover, who is an Alawite Muslim, is not with me, Samuel, my landlord, who is Christian, is friendly this evening. I imagine Samuel with a telescope, able to view, across vast, blue stretches of time and space, me and all my wondrous sins with foreign men: the broad-shouldered Yemeni, Moataz, lithe François from the Ivory Coast, hard-calved Mubaco from Ghana. (Not to mislead, there have also been lonesome, dry spells.) Samuel probably sees me too, when I am nude at Karim's flat, even after I have escaped from the rented flat downstairs. Did he watch his own daughter, Omneia, with the same single-minded fascination? But she is married, tucked away in suburban Connecticut; I am single, in my late thirties — teasing the edge of respectability in Lattakia, a provincial town on the Mediterranean coast of Syria.

Samuel also listens. Does he pretend he is spying for the Syrian Secret Police, the *Mukhabarat?* Or is he *really* getting a cut? Cash for a few embellished crumbs: Gretchen and the Alawi strolled around Lattakia for seven hours and then sauntered downtown to eat syrupy *kanaffa,* crammed with sweet goat cheese at the sweet shop, Magnun Leila. After they gorged on the ambrosial kanaffa, they had wild, orgiastic sex on the thin foam mattresses in the Arabic coffee room downstairs. Or, the Alawi helped her set mouse traps for the rat who had nibbled half an onion from the basket next to her stove, plucked two ripe figs from on top of the refrigerator, and pushed over her cinnamon, before performing his grand finale: rings of rosy pellets around the burners of the stove. (For bait, Gretchen and the Alawi used Miriam's stuffed grape leaves, made with the fat of bone marrow, the heads of fried perch, and honeyed, nutty baklava. Not surprisingly, the dog-sized rat knocked over the shrimpy traps. Anyway, what respectable rat would eat day-old food? Like any rat, he wants his food fresh.) But maybe, Samuel, shrewd goat that he is, only thinks of Karim as *the Alawi*, but in his report it is Karim, since the current administration is Alawite. (The Assads are Alawites, a sect of Shi'a Islam. Sunni Muslims are the majority in Syria.)

I must be a lucrative tenant, or at least, an entertaining one. Maybe his watching is just the voyeurism of a bored, old man. But then, why should profit and pleasure be exclusive? In Syria, watching is serious business, and a good many people supplement their incomes by snitching on their neighbors.

After two years, I have come to realize: being watched *all the time* is an immense psychological burden. I could not stand a lifetime of this intense scrutiny; I don't think I could even manage a third year. I feel as if I have been swimming underwater for too long, and I can't breathe.

For fun, a few days before I left the country, I attended the 4th of July Embassy Party in Damascus. The well-kept grounds of the Ambassador's house were festooned with stars-and-stripes streamers. I even snapped a photograph of a woman wearing a red, white, and blue hat-shaped umbrella. Ice chests were crammed with cold Budweiser and Michelob and platters piled high with hot dogs, hamburgers, potato salad, pickles, watermelon, and ice cream — a good old-fashioned picnic. Americans and Syrians were lining up for food; I savored my cold beer. Karim was chatting with Jim and Sally, an American couple, who were sitting at another table. A DJ cranked oldies and goodies, like, "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down."

Only seven months before, in December 1999, a mob had stormed the inside of the Ambassador's house, smashing glass bookcases, ripping out the pages of precious books, and tossing furniture out windows. Behind the iron door, Christine Crocker, the Ambassador's wife, had listened and waited. The minutes must have seemed like years as she wondered what would happen if the mob did get into the safe room. The Damascus Community School and the British Council had also been trashed.

The government-organized demonstrations had spun out of control: retaliation for the U.S. bombing of Iraq.

U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East was senseless and capricious: I did not agree with the bombing of Iraq, or the sanctions against that nation, or our unqualified support for Israel, or our stance toward the Palestinians.

Still, as a citizen, I could complain without fear. Vote for another President. Write what I wanted.

The July 4th crowd gathered to watch the flag ceremony. Three Marines, carrying the American flag, marched out across the manicured green grass, to salute the American Ambassador, Ryan Crocker. I heard the familiar lyrics: "Oh, say can you see / by the dawn's early light…." Karim was standing next to me, but he did not know the anthem. But why would he since he was Syrian? I remembered how Mrs. England had made us place our hands over our hearts and sing our national anthem every day in fifth grade; I had become bored and cynical about this routine. But this time, I wept. Political and personal freedom were *very dear*.

*

In Syria I was watched because I was a Fulbright Lecturer, an American, affiliated with the Embassy in *enemy territory*; and I was a single woman, living in an Arab country. The political and the personal intertwined and crisscrossed, like a nautical knot.

Sometimes, I talked loudly over my landlord's, Samuel's, heavy breathing on the telephone. He wasn't even sneaky.

"I have it now. Thank you," I said, but he stayed on the line, anyway. I knew he could hear. Should I shout louder?

Was someone also listening to Samuel? The fourth party, who listened to the third party listening to the first and second party? If I hadn't seen the absurdity and humor in all this fruitless vigilance, I might have driven myself crazy. Just how many people were watching me?

Karim also sensed when Samuel was listening in, and talked in an obvious code: "You know, we have visitors." "For our third party." Or, "We will discuss this later without the ears."

I doubt we fooled cagey Samuel.

If I was in a good mood, I found this heavy-handed secrecy amusing, as if I were actually living in Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana.* Should I have told Karim, "My Daddy caught a diamond at the circus"? Or, "Not till the fat lady sings"?

That riddle might have kept someone at the Mukhabarat office busy. However, I was usually annoyed by the lack of privacy: Samuel was *always* listening. The party line we shared was ideal for eavesdropping.

Samuel had spliced his own phone line so that I could have a phone. An elaborate rig of wires, lines, and silver electrical tape bellied down the side of his villa, climbed through the window, stole underneath the Oriental rug in the living room into my bedroom, and snaked up onto my rickety bedroom table. The phone was a heavy black one, a rotary dial, with a hearty ring. The system we had agreed to was this: I would not answer the phone; if the call was for me, they would ring a buzzer upstairs. Samuel's buzzing was insistent and impatient: *where are you?* His wife, Miriam, usually buzzed three times, quick, a lighter touch. If I was there, I picked up the phone. Miriam and Samuel were erratic about passing on messages, unless the Embassy called. In that case, Samuel taped a note, written in loopy, old-fashioned cursive, to the door of my flat. *You must call Leesa from the Embassy at once.* And then signed, the formal *yours sincerely, Samuel*.

The Cultural Attaché, Leesa, who was in charge of the Fulbrighters in Syria, had said, "Make sure you rent a flat with a phone." Yet every dark, dingy flat with heavy, gilded furniture that I had seen had no phone. (Most rented flats in Syria do not have phones, because landlords are afraid of being left with huge phone bills by their tenants.) If in trouble, should I send a smoke signal to Damascus?

After ten days of viewing grim flats without phones, I had visited the Public Relations Officer, Simon, at the University. I was reassured by the fragile, lopsided plant perched on a tiny table in front of his office desk. Someone had tied a thin red ribbon around the edge of the pot.

"You could always stay in the hotel. It's cheap," he said.

"For the entire year," I replied, incredulous. My stomach wrenched from diarrhea cramps and homesickness. I started to cry.

"You don't want to stay in the Faculty flats?"

"Too isolating. There's no phone," I said.

"I don't blame you."

Simon ordered tea and handed me a Kleenex. He was sitting in a large comfortable brown chair beside me. He had a Masters in Counseling from the States; he had spent five years there as a young man. Now he was close to retirement. He was fair, with gentle, hazel eyes. His straight, grayish hair was brushed to the opposite side, to hide bald spots, but in the back he had a few luxuriant curls, like my father. He was swaybacked; this emphasized his stomach; otherwise, he was trim. Surprisingly, he was wearing practical, rubber-soled walking shoes, not formal leather ones.

"You know, I always wanted to stay in the States. I often wonder what my life would have been like if I had stayed there," Simon said, smiling. He was nostalgic, but not bitter.

Because of Equal Opportunity, the job he had applied for had gone to a black woman. How quirky fate was: he was listening to me now in Lattakia, Syria, instead of working in the Admissions Office at Connecticut College.

"Yes, your life would have been quite different," I said, sipping the dark brown tea he ordered for me.

I had stopped crying. I wondered what it would be like to work at Tishreen University for *my entire career*.

The campus was considerably more gruesome than many of the flats than I had seen. After the university gate, were endless rows of tall, gray, tenement-like student housing. Further into the compound were two-story faculty flats, deserted, sand-colored condominiums, Sixties-style, with opaque, moon-shaped windows. The Dean had said, a little too brightly, "As you know, we've promised to provide you with housing. They are changing your sheets just now." Leesa had insisted on seeing the flat. As we trooped past the sad swimming pool with brackish water at the bottom, she gave me a meaningful look.

Since the Dean was *too busy*, he sent Khaleel, the Director of the Language Institute, to show us the flat.

"Does anyone live here?"

He bowed. "Oh, yes. There's one man and his family who would live next door to Gretchen. He works in the accounting office."

"Do they speak English?"

Khaleel shrugged. I took that as a NO. "But good practice for your Arabic," Khaleel added, smiling at me.

"Is there a phone?"

"Unfortunately, there is no phone. But the flat is free," Khaleel said.

"Well, it looks like you guys have dropped the ball on this one," Leesa said, shading her eyes to look inside the moon-shaped window.

"Pardon me?"

"We'll have to find Gretchen somewhere else to live," Leesa said.

"I don't want to be across from the boy's dorms. No privacy," I said, looking up at the rows of tenements. Many young Arab men were peering down at us.

"We'll discuss this later," Leesa said, as we picked our way through the mud back to the car.

But Leesa had returned to Damascus, and I still had not found a decent flat. I was staying in the Zenobia, a small, clean hotel a few blocks from the university. The friendly, sympathetic staff had even brought me medicine for my diarrhea. "You like our country?" they asked often. I nodded, although it was difficult not to hide my gloom. Lattakia was *the bush*. I was touched by their generosity and concern; however, my queasy stomach was not helped by my daily expeditions to the university.

Just beyond the Sixties-style condominiums and the abandoned swimming pool, the university loomed like a Soviet prison with faceless cement blocks. A few tendrils of grass sprouted on the muddy lawn. Yellow bulldozers hummed back and forth along the side road to the campus. (What were *they doing*?) Each Faculty building was color-coded with faded pastels of yellow, green, and pink. My landmark for the Faculty of Arts, though, was the pile of shredded aluminum metal, which looked like an installation, at the entrance. Otherwise, I could not distinguish one corridor or one entrance from another. Inside, there were long, cavernous hallways, which led further and further into a maze. The

open spaces, were crowded with hundreds of students, who drifted together in small packs. Not one piece of furniture anywhere, except for a few dusty benches. Students sat on the top of the benches to avoid being covered in dust.

The campus had no decoration, except for the same picture of Hafez il-Assad, again and again, hung by the Ba'ath Party, who ran the university. Odd, but Assad looked mild with his half-smile and affectionate eyes, a Good Daddy, not the one who had squashed the fundamentalist Muslim uprising in Hama in 1982, killing an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 Syrian civilians. Further into the labyrinth was a golden, Roman-like bust of Assad in an enormous, vacant hall. If I reached the bust, I was close to Simon's office and not too far from the Post Office, both oases.

I studied the weak plant that Simon had placed in front of his desk. Except for in his office, I had not noticed a single plant anywhere inside the university.

"My sister, Miriam, has a flat. It's not that good. No one has stayed there for a long time. I will have to ask her," Simon was saying.

"Okay." I was sure this would be another flat without a phone.

It was.

And yet tangerine roses were blooming in the garden outside. I was tempted by the white granite balcony, close to the roses which twined up the side of the villa. Along the narrow walkway were hibiscus bushes and, further back, some citrus trees. Inside, the flat had a Mediterranean feel, with high ceilings and large windows. Yes, the floors were dusty and the furniture a little tacky, with faded, oversized flowered slipcovers but I sensed the possibilities of light and air and space. This would be a wonderful place to write.

And I was charmed by Samuel, Miriam's husband. He gestured with his thick, knuckled hands, "We will share the phone line. Run the phone line down to your flat. We will bring you a television. Is there anything else you want? Dishes. We will bring you dishes. What else, my dear? I am sorry for my bad English."

"Your English is fine," I said.

A tad disingenuous, since he hadn't made a single grammatical error.

"I taught myself," Samuel smiled broadly, and then winked at me. He was balding and had keen, mischievous eyes. Short, with a broad stomach, in his late sixties or early seventies. He reminded me of Danny DeVito.

I imagined he would tell me hundreds of wild stories about his experiences as a sailor, worldly anecdotes about his life as a customs inspector in Lattakia, and war tales about fighting for the Free French in World War II.

All of us were sitting on the balcony, and it was hot. Miriam offered me a purple drink. She carried the drinks on a silver tray.

"*Shokron,"* I managed, but the rest of my Arabic deserted me.

"This is *tut*. Do you know *tut?"* Samuel asked.

It was very sweet, and reminded me of KoolAid.

"Mulberries. Fresh. Miriam made it."

"Do you speak Arabic?" Simon said.

"Some." But when Simon and Miriam spoke in Arabic, I understood nothing. It was far removed from the Modern Standard, my Iraqi Arabic teacher, Medeha, had insisted on at the University of Alabama. All that washed up: *uhawal.* I am trying, but when I used this verb, Miriam didn't understand. I did not pronounce the "h" correctly.

Samuel re-translated my Arabic.

She shook her head and smiled. "*Biddik tanyi*?"

I had no idea what she was asking.

Samuel translated, "Would you like more of this delicious fresh drink?"

"Yes, please," I said, although I was not sure it was good for my stomach.

She took my empty glass to the kitchen and returned with more sweet *tut.* She was wearing a light cotton housedress and slippers. Her calves were thick and strong.

"Syrian dialect. You will learn it with time," Simon said. I did not see how this could possibly be true. My stomach wrenched again from cramps.

"How much do you want for the apartment?"

"Two hundred dollars. In dollars. Everything is included," Samuel said.

"You can look at some other apartments. Take a few days to make your decision," Simon suggested.

But I wanted to settle in. And I chose Miriam and Samuel's flat because Samuel was colorful. My instincts for good fiction and atmosphere prevailed over the practical: hot water, a decent washing machine, better furniture. Why didn't I notice that there was no hot water in the kitchen? I would spend the next two years boiling hot water for dishes in a witch's cauldron. The irascible washing machine was thirty years old, one Samuel had dragged out of an old flat somewhere. It didn't work well, so I washed my clothes at Karim's flat. A row would have happened had I no alternative. Miriam and Samuel always insisted the machine worked like *spanking new.*

"I'll take it."

"You will be like our daughter. None of our children live in Syria. Two live in the States and the oldest is in the Emirates." Samuel said.

I became Samuel's new project. How could he be anything but what he was: an Arab Father? From his point of view, I was a single woman far from home, living under his roof, and needed to be protected, even from nice men. When Karim called, he growled, "*Shu biddak?"* What do you want? Not Please, or May I ask who's calling?

When he finally told me that Karim had called, he did not say, "Karim called," but "Some man called for you."

Later, when I disappeared for a day with Karim, he rang my doorbell for a full report.

"Where have you been? I was very worried about you," he said, standing in the entry of my flat.

How could I wiggle out of my new identity as Arab Daughter?

"That's very kind of you to be concerned, but I was not in any danger."

"But you, my dear, are my responsibility," Samuel said.

I did not correct him. Three interrogations later, however, I said, "I appreciate your concern, but I am thirty-seven years old. I am an adult and capable of taking care of myself."

Though he had a tough veneer, I saw from the look on his face that he was hurt. But maybe his paternalism was a respectable disguise for voyeurism. Did Samuel fantasize about my adventures when I disappeared from his flat downstairs?

The Syrian government wasn't embarrassed about their nosiness. All information was considered crucial to internal security.

One day when Karim and I were dallying at his place, I wondered if his apartment was bugged. The moment might not be private. Someone might *see* into this heavily curtained room after all. It was *not* out of the realm of possibility. I imagined Tamer, the head of security at the university, with headphones on: alone, envying our jokes and intimacy. But Tamer didn't know enough English to sift through our conversations, as he searched for the tiniest offhand remark about Israel, like a small pebble in the rice, or

listened for some casual comment about the office politics at the American Cultural Center.

"Maybe Tamer is listening to us," I said.

Karim laughed and gestured upward with his hand. "Someone higher than Tamer."

Living in Syria had made Karim cunning: he distrusted most people.

His six years in Great Britain had not been a holiday from the third party's penetrating gaze, either. The Muhabarat knew all the details of Karim's involvement with a well-connected Syrian woman while he was a student in England.

"Syrians are always reporting on each other. *Especially* from abroad," he said.

Even though Karim had been living in a more democratic society, he had not been free of Syrian suspicion and paranoia. He could never escape the fear that someone would inform, wherever he was. I remembered the taunt at the playground: "Nanny-nanny-boo-boo. I'll tell if you do." But the Syrians were telling the Secret Police, not the teacher.

Their relationship had turned ugly when Karim had refused to let Amina copy off his exam paper.

"I refused to be her slave. If she tried to cheat in Syria, it would have been harder to refuse. Besides, I didn't want to jeopardize my own chances — I had worked hard to get the scholarship. She couldn't behave the same way she had in Syria. Could she do the work or not?"

She could not do the work.

So the Mukhabarat had been informed because Karim had refused to help Amina cheat on a university exam in Britain.

More juicy gossip for the report: Amina had threatened him with some toughs. Karim had gotten into a bar brawl.

"She thought she could bully me. I refused. That's all. In England, at the university the examiners wanted to see what you knew. They didn't care if you were connected to the Assads or not."

"It sounds like a terrible experience," I said.

"I was so lucky I escaped. If I had slept with her, I would have had to marry her, too. She was always trying to tempt me."

"How?"

"Inviting me to her room and taking off her clothes. Then I knew she planned to tell her family that I had taken advantage of her. She would no longer be a virgin."

"Was she attractive?" I asked.

"Very beautiful."

"I can't imagine trapping someone into marrying me," I said.

"You are different."

I did not come from a culture which based family honor on the idea of female purity, either.

Samuel watched me because he was an Arab male. No matter, that I was not a nubile virgin and he was not protecting his family honor. It was his habit to watch, supervise, oversee, protect, and dominate women. Karim watched, too. However, his watching felt like devotion. He helped me with household chores, like shopping, cooking, washing clothes; we shared meals; he called; he listened; he comforted me when I was depressed. However, he did not hover. Although I had noticed that Karim also watched his handsome sister, Yasmine, in the same way Samuel watched me. As busy as Karim was, he still found time to call his parents' apartment to ask if Yasmine had returned from the university.

"Wen ha?" he demanded of his mother. Where *was she?* Ironically, his mother who had nine children at home, didn't have the energy for surveillance. She was too busy cutting off the heads of okra for the next meal.

If my relationship with Karim became permanent, would his watching become oppressive like Samuel's? Too much watching implied distrust; not enough was indifference, or a lack of care.

My landlord, Samuel was not indifferent. He often appeared at my door with stuffed figs, homemade hummus, and sackfuls of lemons and oranges from the trees in his garden. And he wooed me with invitations for drinks, lunches, and breakfasts.

Immediately after I moved in, he invited me to have lunch in their home. He was excited, like a small child.

"You will take lunch with us. And you will have the most delicious food in Syria. Miriam is a wonderful cook. But I, I will prepare the kebab," he said.

They had prepared enough food for a small army: grilled kebabs on skewers, rice with giblets, chewy, hot bread, a fresh salad of tomatoes and cucumbers, stuffed olives, and plates of assorted pickles. For dessert, she brought out bunches of fat grapes.

Throughout the entire meal, Samuel took skewers from the small metal tub. To keep the meat hot, he had covered the meat with pita bread. With his bulbous thumb, he pushed the kebabs off the skewers onto my plate.

"Really, I can't eat anymore," I said.

"You are our guest. It is our duty to feed our new daughter."

After the meal, when we were drinking Turkish coffee, Samuel said, "Do you want to see my green card?"

He was very proud of the green card. "Very nice," I said. I had heard a great deal about green cards, but not actually seen one.

"I can work in the States if I want. If it were just me, I would move there in a minute. But Miriam doesn't like the lifestyle. And she doesn't speak English."

"*Shu?"* Miriam asked.

Samuel translated what he had just said.

"I also have a son. About your age," he said.

He showed me pictures of his son, the engineer who lived in Connecticut. Not bad, but he had a goofy smile. He was posing for the camera.

Miriam smiled, "*Biddik Zouaj?"*

"Don't you want to get married?" Samuel translated.

"Well, I just…" I said. I just didn't feel like explaining myself.

Miriam said, smiling, *"Lesh la?"* Why, not?

"You are the same age? Don't you think he is handsome?" Samuel said, pushing for an answer.

I hedged. "He's fine. I'm sure he's a nice person."

"You will meet him when he comes to visit," Samuel said, enthusiastic.

"*Shu?"* Miriam asked.

"What was it like fighting for the Free French?"

"Do you want to see my picture? I was a devil," he said, winking at me.

He went into the bedroom, and returned with a shoebox.

He fished a black and white photo of himself out of the box, saying, "You see, I was a devil."

"Yes, you were." I said. I looked at a picture of a much slimmer man in a sailor's uniform with a healthy shock of brown hair.

"You see why Miriam fell in love with me," he said. Without waiting for Miriam to ask, he translated.

She laughed.

"Now, I will show you how I learned English," he said. He set the shoebox on the couch. Looking through a small bookshelf, he pulled out a worn red book with a tattered spine.

"This was how," he said, holding up the book: HOW TO TEACH YOURSELF ENGLISH IN FORTY DAYS.

"That's wonderful. Amazing. Such motivation," I said.

"I left school at eighteen. I also had chances to speak with people from all over the world when I was in the navy. And the radio, always, I listened to the BBC. Of course, I speak French, too. In those days, they taught French in school," he said.

"Most students at the **u**niversity don't have that kind of motivation. You must really have wanted to learn."

"I made sure my children had a university education. My son, Wafik, I sent to the United States for his education. It was expensive, but I managed it."

I admired Samuel's resourcefulness. During the first few months, I had lunch with Miriam and Samuel almost every week. Later, I was busier and didn't see them quite so often.

When I was getting to know Karim, he said, "You are being invited a lot, and that is good. I am not trying to interfere, but does anyone ever try to get you to talk about politics?"

"Sometimes it comes up," I said.

Karim said, "Don't say a word. No matter what you feel. Even if they criticize the government. They will try to get you to agree and then they will run and tell the Secret Police. This is an old trick."

On the evenings when Samuel invited me for Scotch the conversation turned sour.

After a few neat drinks, he ranted against the government. I could not tell if this was a trick; I wasn't practiced at sniffing out duplicity. His frustration seemed genuine.

I did not want to believe Samuel was *an informer.*

However, he did listen to my phone calls and watched my movements. Had he also nosed through my notebooks when I was in Damascus?

Suppose Samuel had been told he *would have* to report on me, even if he had not wanted to. Forget about the cut, the profit. There was no choice.

This speculation made me *feel better.* Less betrayed. The overtures of friendship had not been a pretense. Or was this speculation simply self-delusion?

Yet Samuel was dissatisfied enough with the country to encourage all of his children to emigrate from Syria for a better life somewhere else. The price for such unselfishness was great: Samuel and Miriam rarely saw their grown children.

Occasionally, the phone would ring at five-thirty in the morning with a call from *Amerika.*

On those mornings, Miriam would interrupt my writing to bring me roses from her garden. How could I be angry when she presented me with lovely, fragrant roses?

Miriam hoped her children would return to Syria. She did not understand the attraction of the States. Amerika was dangerous. Amerika was too competitive. Amerika was expensive. There was no community in Amerika. The tomatoes didn't taste good in Amerika. They didn't sell small eggplants in Amerika. How could she make her *mahshee*, stuffed eggplants if she went there? And even though her daughter, Omneia, was an Arabic teacher, her grandchildren couldn't speak Arabic. Worst of all, her children had abandoned Syrian traditions to *fit into* America.

When, and how often, Miriam and Samuel should see their children in the States was a source of tension between them.

One night I heard shouting upstairs, late at night. She was softer and more tactful than Samuel, but she was not weak.

She wanted to go the States; Samuel said they didn't have the money. If they didn't go this summer, they would have to wait another year.

"*Sena tanyia, waqt tawil, tawil*," she said. Another year would be a long, long time.

The two children who lived in the United States could not visit them in Syria, either. They were waiting for their citizenship: they must stay in the United States for so many months without leaving the country. If her son, Wafik, returned, he would be conscripted into the Syrian Army.

When Miriam wondered why her children did not return, Samuel said to me in English, "Why should they return for good? What is there for them here?"

Samuel talked about his children, but he never told me any wild stories about his life as a sailor or a customs inspector.

Whenever I asked about the port, and the way it was run, he became evasive. His expansive manner would vanish. The most he would say was: "Sometimes it takes five months to get a ship through the port. Too many government regulations. You can see why nobody wants to dock here. They will lose money."

Instead, he relished stories about Muslim conspiracy. Chewing on a shallot, he'd begin, "You see how we are being squashed by the Muslims. And they are even taking over the world."

I had not heard this conspiracy theory. Still, Christians were a minority in Syria. They felt threatened; they did not rule the country.

Samuel was probably hostile to Karim because he was an Alawite Muslim. However, Karim's family was poor and had no real influence. Whatever his reason, I did not like the rude way Samuel treated him.

The second year, I declined Samuel's invitations for Scotch. When I tried to speak to Miriam in Arabic, he re-translated what I said. He corrected my Arabic so often that I could never finish a sentence. And his conversation was desultory and gloomy: more of, the Muslims were taking over the world; the government was corrupt; the daily news about Israel was a distraction from the problems within Syria. Always the same diatribes — no new ideas.

The appearance of the rat in my flat diverted him from his dispirited talk about Syria. I had forgotten how hilarious he could be.

He rang my doorbell every morning, like a travelling salesman. He was more excited about the rat than about his recent trip to Switzerland for the shipping company he worked for.

"Any news?"

"No corpse, if that's what you mean," I said.

"Since the poisonous candy failed, we will try this," he said, holding up a large brown jar, a picture of a skull and crossbones on the label. "Enough poison to kill a hundred rats."

"I don't think he'll bite. This is the smartest rat I've ever seen."

He laid Handiwrap on the floor with meat and onion bull's-eye center. Next, he doused the meat with poison.

"Believe me, when the rat knows he is going to die, he will go home," he said.

"You think so?" I asked.

The next morning, Samuel rang my doorbell at seven-thirty.

"Any news?"

"He ate the meat," I said.

"He is gone," Samuel said, waving his thick hands. "Finished."

A few mornings later, the rat scurried across my feet while I stood at the kitchen sink. I drew back the curtain, which hid the drainpipe. But there was no drainpipe! Two rubber hoses, one for the washing machine that didn't work; the other for the kitchen sink, disappeared into a hole. The rat was nimble enough to squeeze past the rubber hoses.

I marched upstairs for a conference with Miriam.

She came down to investigate. Droppings covered the floor near the drain.

"*Musebe,"* she muttered. Disaster.

Per Miriam's instructions, he bought a sackful of cement and mixed it on the street. He plugged up most of the hole with cement.

Had Samuel drawn out the killing of this rat because he was lonely?

A few days before I left Syria, I heard murmuring outside my window. Samuel and Miriam were together, picking lemons from their tree in the garden. Miriam, on the ladder, was wearing a cotton housedress, with flowery print. Samuel wore a yellow hard hat. He was holding the ladder and was pointing to branches.

A minute later, he turned around and headed for the window.

"Take these, my dear," Samuel said, handing me a fistful of lemons that I didn't have time to eat.

My cheap camera in hand, I rushed out to the garden to take their pictures. I might not see them again.

The day I left Syria, I hugged Miriam and Samuel goodbye. Miriam stood next to the gate, waving, until the taxi was out of sight. But Samuel's eyes welled with tears and he ducked inside the villa.

I was touched.

Undoubtedly, a despotic government such as Syria's based on informers, secrets, and mistrust created a negative, unpleasant atmosphere. And yet, the government couldn't completely control people's emotions and thoughts, even watching day and night. Perversely, it wasn't that they watched too much, but that they couldn't watch *enough.* No matter how hard the Syrian government tried to make all relationships political, personal relationships would flourish and defy the rule of power.

Maybe Samuel had been an informer. But maybe not. I would never know for certain.

Even if he was, his emotion was genuine. Samuel was going to miss me.

Tenderness and affection were more noble than those other toxic emotions I had become too familiar with, suspicion and cynicism.

Like his children, I was leaving Syria, for opportunity elsewhere.

And most probably I wasn't coming back.

Endnotes

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For all the good works, the money and the hospitals, the volunteer doctors, the aid projects, the dams and the schoolrooms, the truth is that it was an unequal war, and everyone knew it. There was no Viet Cong air force, let alone Viet Cong B-52 bombers, and no artillery fire bases (although in time the North Vietnamese would cause havoc with Russian-made mortars and rockets). I have no doubt that the Communists, if they had possessed the aircraft and bombs, would have used them far more ruthlessly than the Americans used them. As it was, they had tools that were much more effective in a people's war. The basic and most useful question is not and never has been the effect of American firepower on the Vietnamese – it is the effect on the Americans, who bear responsibility for its use. It would somehow have seemed more reasonable if there were convincing evidence that the B-52 strikes and the artillery bombardments at night were helping the war effort, rather than hurting it. But there was no such evidence….

The population did not engage in the struggle. The Viet Cong did not regard American weaponry as decisive. And the inequality of the struggle, 500,000 men and their machines for so little advance, only increased American frustrations. It *was* unequal, and therefore unfair. It went against the American grain. When the guerrillas bombed a billet or assassinated a district chief, the Americans called it terrorism. They had to call it terrorism because guerrilla warfare did not fit the scheme of the war as they were fighting it….

But how could you change it? The war was not a tennis match., with seeds, or an auto *grand prix* with corrected times for the slower cars. You did what you had to do to win, or what you thought would bring victory closer…. How could millions of pounds of bombs over enemy targets conceivably be a failure? The logic was inescapable. In Vietnam a moderate was a man who thought that the only thing worse than winning the war was losing it, for what would come with defeat would be far worse than anything that would come with victory. So the war was fought, and a plausible and powerful case can be made that given the situation in 1965, all the combat troops should have been committed at once; once the interventionist course had been decided, the Americans then should have pressed ahead on a one hundred percent basis, with troop call-ups and rationing at home. But it happened piecemeal, and hindsight is an unfair tactic to use in talking about American policy in Vietnam. In prosecuting a conventional war against a skilled guerrilla army operating among, at best, an indifferent population, there was a heavy psychological price to pay. And the Americans were paying it.

Ward Just
TO WHAT END

Number of Pop-Tarts dropped on Afghanistan as part of U.S. airborne food aid in the first month of bombing: 2,400,000 – "Harper's Index," *Harper's Magazine*, January 2002 (Source: Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Arlington, Va.)

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The Bear

One December during the Eighties when I went back into Alaska, I spent several months in Fairbanks, living in an absent friend's small house back on a ridge south of town. I had also been loaned a yellow truck, a rattletrap, that belonged to a hunting guide who was wintering in the mountains. The weather was very cold; but the highway was dry

and easy to travel on, once the truck was running, and I was driving into town, wrapped in a mood that was sharp-eyed, solitary, and expectant.

Along the roadside the birches thinned into a small clearing. At the edge of this clearing I saw an apparition. Near the trees stood a remarkably tall, graceful young woman. Winter birds, redpolls and the tiny buntings, nestled in the crook of her arm.

I thought: *Not Rilke's angels, but animals, who watch their people and their tormenters from the forest's edge.*

Now I am at home in cities in ways no longer possible to me in the North. In those days I was young and resolutely innocent; my eyes were wide open; and I am convinced that what I saw was real. Afterward, I returned to the East Coast, to a reasonable, secular life, and I grew wary of the imminent unseen.

I noticed sharply the alteration in myself in Fairbanks last August, where, on a week's visit, I felt as if I had stepped back into another era, faintly remembered. The disheartening surprise was that so much was familiar. Fairbanks will never be a city; it is still a frontier town, where the tensions between whites and Natives are still tightly wound. But where was the frontier, ideological homeland of so many Alaskans, now? Where was the boundary that, at times, can be crossed, though never freely, only on sufferance?

A book of mine, an account of a mythopoeic journey into the interior of Alaska, had been published, and I wanted to know if a certain woman, a major figure in it, approved of what I had written. For, though she had been my friend and my teacher, an uncertainty exists between writer and subject when they have been like mother and daughter, but live far apart in very different worlds. The great world had changed in 1989, as I had observed in the foreword, because (following the argument of the historian John Lukacs) our historical consciousness had changed. In 1989, proposed Lukacs, the twentieth century ended. And so, I had looked backward across a global dividing line.

Also, I was worried about her health. And also, I wanted to see if the Alaska I had once known was still visible, or whether life outside had altered my vision entirely. In what century, though, did Alaska live? I wanted to look beneath the fraught surface – the military-industrial complex that organized so much of the Alaskan economy was gearing up for enormous projects, promising new infusions of money into the populace – and see the connective tissue underneath. Long ago I had learned that everything in that country is connected to everything else; stories unfold and fold back, one into another. More directly, the old Koyukon Athabaskans talked of *sinh' talaa*, a sort of spirit of energy running through the ground. "The land knows," they would say. "Everything you do, the land knows."

1.

Beforehand, I had heard a good deal of talk about development. More oil drilling, possibly in ANWR (the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve; the House voted in favor of it while I was there); more coal mining (there are large beds of lignite, a sulfurous, inferior grade of coal found in the Interior), a gas pipeline proposed, to run part-way at least parallel to the oil line; and the first steps taken on the new administration's favored project, the Missile Defense Shield. President Bush had announced that he intended to violate the ABM treaty (1972) the U.S. had signed with Russia unless Russia agreed to abrogation. Around the state there seemed, generally, to be enthusiasm for all of these possibilities, I was told. An old friend well-connected to business people who are enthusiasts of the outdoors explained why: because development meant money. Because during the

Nineties, when the rest of America was getting rich on dot-com schemes and the bull market, Alaska was left behind, and people felt that now it was their turn to do well. That sounded familiar, the Jacksonian-democratic grudge against those who seemed to do better than oneself, for whatever reason.

My old friend, a retired professor, met me at the airport – the plane touched down at midnight; in early August the sky is all but dark – and we had a beer, late, at the Capt. Bartlett Inn. The Capt. Bartlett is a grubby-"authentic" little hotel/motel where for some reason I like to spend the first night when I go back. The rooms are small, ugly, and overheated, with cardboard-thin walls; it doesn't matter, the staff is friendly. In the saloon – swinging doors, sawdust floor, mounted animal heads, cheerful, pretty young waitresses – I went directly to my subject: energy. I wanted to know what the real issues were, on the ground, so to speak. Over the phone, I had doubted his analysis. I thought that he had stayed too long in the North and lost his old intellectual acuity. Back East, I couldn't *see* what he was talking about; having landed, I saw it already, although I could not explain what I saw; perhaps some sense of that *it* leaked through our conversation.

He said the energy issues didn't seem so important here, in the larger sense. If the energy conglomerate wanted to build a gas pipeline many people, even environmentalists, sounded excited at the prospect. If the conglomerate thought there would be adequate return on investment, then they would build; meanwhile, they would sort of toy with people. Same with the coal barons: if they could make enough by digging more coal and sending it to Japan and Korea, then they would dig. Fort Greely and the missile defense shield: we didn't talk about this. About ANWR I asked a question that he said had not been asked. I will come back to that question.

Larger than the energy issues, he said, is something else that he couldn't quite put his hands on, but it looked like fear. Everyone was afraid. Of what? I asked. What, for instance, was the governor's office afraid of? He had used that example. The governor was a Democrat; he reminded me that since statehood, the only Republican governor had been Walter Hickel, a land developer who had also been Nixon's Secretary of the Interior. He said he couldn't see much difference between the Democrats and the Republicans – they both seemed willing to fight to the death before compromising. He believed that people in groups ought to compromise, so that they could do business together. A compromise was when all sides gave up something and came to an agreement that made no one happy but all could live with. In Alaska, though, the fear was something like this, he said: that whatever people think of themselves as being – not in the rat race, at least; not working a job so they could mow the lawn on the weekend – was going away, or perhaps had already gone away; and you couldn't say it was because of the reach of the transnational corporations. I replied that, after 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell, I knew already what the great change in the world was going to mean, because I had seen it in Alaska: the big corporations governed in a way national governments did not, and we were all part of "the economy," which had replaced what we had called society, our civic life. He observed that in the West, i.e., Western America, that had always been true, but that people didn't see that as the important point. The important point was, they saw themselves as living a certain way, independently, with enough space around them in which to move without being directed in social lock-step. But in the last seven or eight years, that sense of independence had begun to change, he said, and white people were very afraid that whatever they thought their lives were, before, had already changed irrevocably.

I asked, what it would *really* mean if a few holes were punched in ANWR. He replied that he didn't know, and didn't know if anyone really knew. Would it affect the caribou? Don't they adapt? I asked. He didn't know, he said. He had a friend who was

high up in the Park Service administration, who had "vast reservations" about the Bush administration's energy plan. He said the administrator had told him grimly that he had witnessed how the caribou on the North Slope have been "interfered with" by the pipeline. But he doubted his friend would want to talk to me, because I was a writer. I asked who I should approach. Celia Hunter, he suggested, a founder of the Alaska Conservation Society. She had been around a long, long time and knew her way and wasn't given to easy answers.

I said the question interested me because it seemed to me that, politically, ANWR is thought about in categories and analogies rather than as a living territory. The technology of drilling oil is vastly improved. Wildlife can be closely observed. Jobs are promised. Why, then, did the Gwich'in Athabaskans of Arctic Village, up there north of the Brooks Range, not want drilling to take place on the Coastal Plain along the Beaufort Sea? During the oil boom, their corporation had sunk some (dry) holes. They explained that they had drilled in areas not essential to the caribou, on which they lived. What did they want to keep – and what did they want to keep out? The Inupiat of the North Slope did want drilling, because they had benefited handsomely from it. The developers and the Teamsters wanted drilling; the environmentalists did not. Perhaps drilling in ANWR was like the death penalty, I said: as execution by the state became more "humane," and people became more frightened by crime, had putting criminals to death not become more politically acceptable? Was that a useful analogy? What was the right analogy? Not the old canard "pristine wilderness" – it was stale, and what did it mean? Humans had always lived off the Alaskan land, centuries before it was called wilderness.

So, I had a question and it felt provocative. By then it was so late that the bar was actually closing. We had a final beer. As always, he wouldn't let me pay. I left feeling disoriented.

2.

Alaska is impossible to comprehend unless one understands that the fundamental social and political fight, not to put too fine a point on it, among the half-million inhabitants of the state is, Who controls the lands? That is, who sets hunting regulations and fishing quotas; who decides what areas are open to subsistence and commercial uses; who designates what classes of the population are eligible to use the land's resources, the animals and fish, for family and personal consumption, and regulates where commercial ventures can operate? What stakes do the Alaska Native regional and village corporations have in the extraction and exploitation of surface and sub-surface non-renewable resources, such as gravel, gold, mercury, and oil? What powers does the Federal government have to set and enforce hunting and fishing regulations, as against the powers of the State? What is the limit of sovereignty – since aboriginal rights were extinguished by the Settlement Act – held by Native corporations over their lands? What is "subsistence," and where is "rural" Alaska?

Before trying to answer any one of these questions – they cannot not be answered in this *aide-mémoire*, but they hover in the background – one must remember that in 1971, the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act was passed by the U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Nixon. The Act, known as ANCSA, settled forty-four million acres and nearly a hundred million dollars onto the Alaska Native peoples (the Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Eyak, Athabaskan, Yup'ik, Inupiat, Aleut, *et al.*); but land and money were distributed among a new kind of governing structure, the for-profit corporation. Two

tiers of these corporations were mandated by the law, and every person recognized as an Alaska Native received shares in two corporations: the regional corporation which in general covered traditional lands of his or her tribal/linguistic group (Athabaskan, Inupiat, etc.), and the village corporation representing the place from which he or she came. Urban Natives were covered by a special category.

The corporations were given twenty years in which to organize and grow profitable; during that time, shares were not alienable to non-Natives. At a blow, Alaska Native people had come face to face with the power of capital and were confronted by its engines, corporate finance and the market. They had had to comprehend what it meant to own their homeland by deed, and to become capitalists in order to keep and manage their remaining lands. They had to make sense of capitalism, as the Central and Eastern European nations have had to do, and in somewhat similar ways.

Nevertheless, in material terms the Settlement Act has meant success for many people. The thirteen regional corporations, at least, have become profitable, distributing often-handsome dividends to their shareholders. At least two of the Inupiat corporations, the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, based in Barrow, and NANA, in Kotzebue, are beneficiaries of oil royalties as well. In effect, their non-profit arms are congruent with regional government. Their for-profit companies employ shareholders, that is, the villagers who are their own people. It was explained to me, for example, that NANA owns construction companies which follow an enlightened and traditional practice of rotating jobs among the available villagers seeking work, so that, where more people than jobs exist, the jobs are shared to everyone's benefit. It seems to me that one of the important stories about Native people is the effect of wealth and home rule, particularly on the North Slope. The Inupiat of the North Slope corporations have an enormous advantage, as do the Canadian Native peoples, because they control their own lands, resources, schools, and access. This does not make them amenable, necessarily, to an outsider's questions, but it does let them decide how to act for their mutual benefit.

3.

The next day I drove down the Alaska Highway to a little town on the banks of the Tanana River, where Malfa Ivanov lives. She is a remarkable woman. In her late sixties, often nearly invalided by serious, chronic diseases, she is still called upon by Native corporations to conduct workshops in cross-cultural relations. (She has a masters degree in education from Harvard.) When I lived in the Interior she took me under her wing as if I were her daughter, in part to protect me – the country was not kind to women traveling alone, particularly if they were writers – in part because she felt I might be taught about Native ways and speak about them to the outside world. And, perhaps in part it was because I needed her. In those days her equally remarkable husband, Frederick, was alive. For thirty years they had owned and run the only Native-owned barge line serving villages on the rivers of the Interior. For all those summers they had traveled the Yukon, the Koyukuk, Porcupine, the Kuskokwim, the Tanana. In winter, she taught school in their home village, out on the Yukon, whose Athabaskan name meant In the Shelter of the Hill; while Frederick ran a trap line. It was work he loved, and she loved him for it. Frederick was Athabaskan, of Russian descent, and his family name was an influential one in the Interior. Malfa was the child of an Aleut mother, who died when Malfa was six, and a French-American father, a seaman from New Hampshire; but she had been brought up in the old mission orphanage in Shelter, and had married Frederick at sixteen. What a life of

adventure they had lived. Their summer base was in this river town, where she had retired after his death.

I had not seen my friend in more than two years. Twice, she had nearly died. Even now she was so ill. She said, "I really feel fine, it's just that my body isn't doing too well." While I was her guest, she had planned to invite a gathering of women who would, she hoped, remind me, who had been away so long, what Native life meant; but this was not possible.

Instead, she lay on her comfortable couch and we talked for hours. I wanted to know what she thought about the energy issues and laid out my questions. I said I was thinking of writing an article. She replied with a caution I remembered well, rooted in the old fear of writers that Native people feel, reflexively, I think. A gentle but long inquiry began. She asked, once more and despite our long friendship, why I had come there originally, and what I *really* wanted to learn. What did I mean when I wrote that the world had changed? The mixture of her fine, deep mind, at play when she spoke about the life she had known for so long, with a startling naiveté about the complexity of the world outside, was new. The end of the Soviet Union and the dominance of Western globalism were abstractions to people like her, with all her experience, who took as real that which they could see and verify. Despite the gloom of my friend the professor, they did still think, stubbornly, that they were individuals making their own lives, untouched by larger invisible forces. The outside would always look greedy and invasive, and the discussion would always begin as an opposition of Native and non-Native points of view. I let myself become quiet, until I could listen; but I felt how distant I had become from her.

That night the House of Representatives voted to open ANWR to drilling. She had a satellite dish and watched a lot of television, a diversion from her constant pain, I think. We watched the vote on C-SPAN. It wasn't clear that the Senate would follow suit, though the Alaskan senators, Stevens and Murkowsky, warned that the coming fight would be bitter. (In early December, the Senate voted it down.) I thought that if drilling occurred, the disaster would be not simply ecological; and that that would be relatively minor compared to the damage done – all over again – to Alaskan society. In the *News-Miner* I had just read that a large Federal grant had been awarded for study and mitigation of domestic violence in the State. In 1976, the year I first arrived, Alaska was known to have the highest rate of domestic violence in the country. Had nothing changed, nothing been learned?

While the House debated, Malfa made a comment that made me sit up, as she meant it to do. Her son-in-law is a whaling captain from Point Hope – perhaps there is no higher achievement for an Inupiaq, and he was barely forty – and an executive in the regional corporation. She said he thought it would be a good idea if some young men from the North Slope went to talk to some young men from the Gwich'in about the benefits of making money. She added that it would take generations before people know how to use so much money. She noticed the materialism displayed in their homes and, remembering dire want, was disturbed by the wastefulness and extravagance of it: the big-screen TVs, game stations, computers, latest all-terrain vehicles, and so on. She thought their spiritual life was still sound, however, and believed that if there were a disaster and they lost their income from stock dividends, they could still survive on the old knowledge.

But one sentence was always off-set by another, opposite one, as she described the situation. The story I followed had taken a turn, while my friend strove to embrace these contradictions that disturbed and worried her.

One day, she had company: a woman about whom I had heard for years but never met dropped by. Twenty-five years ago she had been known as the fiery young mayor of

her Koyukon Athabaskan village, speaking out for Native rights in an way uncommon for a woman of the Interior. Now she lived here, temporarily, she said, and worked as a cook at the local quick-stop. Malfa was polite. They talked about the deficiencies and implied racism of the local high school, and the woman was critical of the Native parents for their fear of political activism. This was the wrong thing to say to Malfa, who had for years spoken out on behalf of Native parents, and whose grandson, a Marine (I remembered him as a little boy running in and out of the house) was the only Native student to graduate in some years. The visit ended on a cool note. Malfa was displeased and, when we were alone, explained, as if having to teach me all over again, that the woman's tongue was too bold for an Athabaskan. This, from my old friend, who during the War on Poverty in the Sixties had been trained by Yukon elders to speak publicly on behalf of her people; who had been known as a fighter. For now, at least, she had adopted the ideology of what makes an Athabaskan woman an "Athabaskan": it depended on demeanor; she sounded an old, old dismay at fast-talking outsiders and their rude interruptions. But, for the first time, I wondered whether the demeanor she preferred, the deference, the dignified avoidance of confrontation, had not evolved from poverty, isolation, and domination by the priests and nuns who had reared so many children in the old mission. It was said of the Athabaskans that they are still unwilling to fight for themselves, to be confrontational. It is a grave weakness, I thought, because their opponents do not, in turn, become deferential, they fight to win! That is how all the social questions here are dealt with: as win/lose fights. If people refuse to fight for themselves, who shall fight for them? But Athabaskans do not control the Interior as the Inupiat do the North Slope, but always must gauge their weight against the white rednecks' and liberals' and that of the corporate men.

A bookstore in Fairbanks invited me to come in and sign copies of my book. For two hours I sat at a table and observed how people behave around an author who – maybe; they didn't know – might be famous. Several people with whom I had long ago lost touch but was very glad to see stopped to say hello. Malfa fell into intense conversation with a professor from the university. Finally, as I was thinking of packing up, an older woman dressed in sporty sweat-gear bought a book. She was a retired teacher from Ohio about to leave for Unalakleet. She had just done a little tour of the Anchorage area, the glaciers, and Denali Park, and was about to head out to a village on the Bering Sea coast, with no idea of where she was going and whom she was going to be teaching. I explained that this book was about a journey among Athabaskans, not Inupiat, but that it might help her understand that when people acted in ways different than she expected – if the students did not make eye contact with her, for example, but kept their gaze politely down or aside – nonetheless, their acts were meaningful and followed the protocol of respect shown a teacher, the person who was responsible for their learning.

After all these years, teachers, those essential people, were still going out to the Native public schools without any preparation – none! – for the place where they would live and work, nor for the people whose children would be put into their care. And village life could be unbearably squalid; and her culture shock would be massive; and she would not know what afflicted her.

Malfa had said nothing about my book but, in a little aside, mentioned an Athabaskan author whose recounting of an old tale about two old women who sacrificed themselves for their people was what publishers call a phenomenon. It had sold well and widely; even my local bookstore carried it. The author was pleased to have earned enough to take care of all her debts and her family as well; but the story she told, said Malfa, "belonged" to everyone in the village, and many of the older people felt a deep sense of communal shame that it had been written and let out to the public. I suggested that

readers would not condemn those old-time people for the hard choices they had once had to make, but would view them with sympathy as complex adults facing the unyielding exigencies of a hard life. She was unconvinced; and I was discouraged. Perhaps her comment was meant for me: that I had told too much. I said that when people have to live with secrets and shame, they get sick from them. And I did feel that much of village sickness – so many deaths, loss, a deep, unuttered sense of defeat – had to do with feeling pried open, spied upon by strangers; but this was never going to change.

4.

Toward the end of the week, I telephoned Dan O'Neill, a writer and journalist I knew slightly in the mid-Eighties, who writes a generally progressive, always skeptical column for the daily paper. He is the author of THE FIRECRACKER BOYS, a history of Project Chariot, the plan devised in the late 1950s by Edward Teller, the "father" of the American hydrogen bomb, to set off an enormous thermonuclear explosion on the northwest coast near Point Hope. It is a sobering story and intimately connected to the history of the land claims movement, yet fantastic even in retrospect. In selling their idea to the public, Teller and his colleagues at Lawrence Livermore Research Laboratory found ingenious ways to justify their nuclear experiment. They claimed that it would demonstrate the "peaceful use" of atomic energy by excavating a natural harbor for commercial use (above the Arctic Circle, where there was little connecting transport); that the "shot" would only be made if it produced economically viable results (although they had no plans to develop the harbor, which would in any case have been ice-bound much of the year); that the radiation produced would be less than the amount already existing in the atmosphere (carefully dissembling the fact that background radiation to which ordinary people are normally exposed would be doubled, the effects of which doubling were unknown, though the possibilities alarmed geneticists); and that, in any case, the detonation would take place in the wilderness far from human habitation (in a hunting area used regularly by the Inupiat of Point Hope, near one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites on the North American continent). All of these reasons were implausible or false. Teller and his "firecracker boys" in fact wanted to see what would happen when a large thermonuclear device was detonated at a certain depth underground.

In his careful narrative, which he calls "historical investigative journalism, perhaps," O'Neill steadily lays out evidence for our examination of how "the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission and its successor agency, the Department of Energy, compiled a stunning record of willful manipulation of facts." For, in fact, the proposed "shot" would also benefit the military's weapons-testing, as Teller and his colleagues acknowledged secretly – even as President Eisenhower was negotiating with Premier Kruschev a limited moratorium on nuclear testing. He quotes the former Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall on the true significance of the project: "There is nothing comparable in our history to the deceit and the lying that took place as a matter of official Government policy in order to protect [the nuclear arms] industry. Nothing was going to stop them and they were willing to kill our own people."

In tone the book is measured and comprehensive, anchored by the weight and breadth of its evidence. In its view of its subject, it is a radical history, and a people's history. In an afterward explaining his reasoning and intent, O'Neill argues that

> [a]t issue is the capacity and tendency of a government agency to circumvent the lawful administration of pubic affairs in order to advance its own agenda. Behind such institutional corruption may be a desire to save the country from a threat that, it is claimed, the citizenry does not fully appreciate. The fallacy, of course, is that, in the process, the zealots trample the very institutions they rush to protect. Rationalizations that bypass the public in matters of public policy threaten democracy in the most basic way: they usurp what Jefferson called the "ultimate powers of society" from their only "safe repository…the people themselves." It is not too exaggerated to say, as Stewart Udall has done, that "the atomic weapons race and the secrecy surrounding it crushed American democracy."

Dan O'Neill's righteous, appalled indignation is that of the citizen who believes that "[a] reverence for such ideals as justice and truth is understood to be among the philosophic underpinnings of democratic governments." He ends with an admonition that rings particularly clear as I write this, as the president amasses enormous powers to his office while his attorney general discourages dissent: "The lesson Project Chariot offers is that a free society must be a skeptical one, that rigorous questioning and dissent protect, rather than subvert, our freedoms."

When I spoke to him, however, it was early August, and I was trying to learn what Alaskans were thinking about an energy policy and the prospect of huge development projects that were going to come down on them. He drew my attention to a matter growing out of the nuclear-testing years, that had become immediate. We knew that President Bush had announced he was going to begin taking steps that would lead to the American violation of the ABM treaty. Nearly certain was the construction of a national missile defense test site, a continuation of the old "Star Wars," at Fort Greely, an army base near the small communities of Delta Junction, Big Delta and Clearwater on the Alaska Highway. This would be the first concrete move in the sequence leading to abrogation of the treaty. He told me there was an active, knowledgeable citizen's group, the Alaska and Circumpolar Coalition against Missile Defense and the Weaponization of Space, popularly called "No Nukes North," whose members had for some time been collecting data and relevant information about the dangers of NMD, as the national missile defense shield scheme is abbreviated. He urged me to look at their website and, if possible, speak to one of the organizers. I asked if he would write a piece about this for *Archipelago*. He had already written what he intended to write, he said, three columns published in the late '90s in the Fairbanks *Daily News-Miner*; I could find them posted on the No Nukes North website.

Dan O'Neill may be the Karl Krauss - Will Rogers of the North. Early on, he took a sardonic bead on the crafty looniness of the missile-shield enterprise. "Let's imagine, for a moment," he wrote in a column published in 1998, "that the military was interested in our ideas on the important questions, that it held a real town meeting, and that an absolutely truthful colonel took public comments and questions from the floor. Here's how it might go:"

> PUBLIC: Can you say a little about the history of the ABM idea?
> COLONEL: Certainly. It was promoted in 1960 by Father of the H-bomb, Edward Teller. At the time, Teller was also proposing to excavate an instant harbor in Alaska by detonating a string of nuclear bombs. His ABM idea was to launch nuclear-tipped rockets that would explode in the vicinity of incoming missiles and

knock them out. Scientists called the idea costly and ineffective. But we built one such ABM facility anyway. In North Dakota. It protected only a battery of our own ICBM's. It was finished in 1975, at a cost of $7 billion, and scrapped the next year. Congress determined its upkeep was a waste of money.

PUBLIC: Didn't the Star Wars program come next?

COLONEL: Exactly. The Strategic Defense Initiative, or Star Wars, was the most expensive military program in the history of the world. By far. Tens of billions were spent on little more than the hope of a laser missile defense system. Weapons scientists called it "a fraud" and "impossible to accomplish." Defense contractors thought it was the next best thing to printing your own money. Needless to say, the system does not exist.

PUBLIC: So now you guys are back pushing a scaled-down version?

COLONEL: Correct.

PUBLIC: Will this one work?

COLONEL: Not really, no. You see, there are easier ways for an Iran or a Libya to attack the US than to try to build ICBM's. They could smuggle a bomb across one of our borders. Or bring one into a city's harbor onboard a ship. Or launch a short-range missile from a ship offshore. If they did build an ICBM, they could build ones that release multiple decoys, thereby reducing our chances of hitting the actual warhead (assuming that we figure out how to hit one at all-our last nine tests have failed). And remember, the missile defense system we are proposing would only build 20 interceptors. So, for $10 billion (our critics say much more) we would not be buying any real security.

PUBLIC: Tell me again why we should do this.

COLONEL: It will deliver mega-dollar hardware and construction contracts to the home states of some pretty influential senators.

PUBLIC: Like Alaska?

COLONEL: Affirmative. Sen. Ted Stevens says he doesn't care where the ABM is based, just so long as it can defend all 50 states. Well, North Korea is just 2,000 miles from Attu Island at the end of the Aleutian Chain. North Dakota is nearly 4,000 miles from Attu. So even if North Dakota could launch an interceptor at the same instant that North Korea launched an ICBM toward Attu, the Korean missile would get there first. Sen. Stevens has got this figured.

PUBLIC: OK, I see what's in it for the politicians and the recipients of pork. But what's in it for you?

COLONEL: A $600,000 salary at one of the missile defense contractors after I retire from government service.

PUBLIC: Is there anything we can do about this?

COLONEL: Yes sir. You can insist on culverts.

5.

If the people at No Nukes North are correct – and they back up their argument with seemingly accurate data, scientific papers, and Defense Department reports – the larger goal of NMD is the "weaponization" of space, which the United States would dominate. As construction of the test site continues, here are some facts to consider about Fort Greely, according to Dan O'Neill:

In 1962, the first "portable" nuclear power plant to be built in the field attained criticality at Fort Greely, Alaska…. The reactor operated for ten years as low-level radioactive waste was pumped into nearby Jarvis Creek and into a well drilled for that purpose.

When the U.S. military considered where in the world to test deadly nerve gas and germ-warfare agents, they chose Alaska. At the secret Gerstle River Test Site, part of the 1,200-square-mile Fort Greely Military Reserve in Interior Alaska, the army experimented with some of the most deadly chemical agents known to man. Mustard gas and the lethal nerve gases known as VX and GB were packed into rockets and artillery shells and either launched or fired from howitzers into the spruce forests and marshes of the Gerstle River area. Of course, not every piece of ordnance detonates as it is supposed to do, and "the test area remains a no-man's-land," according to a military historian.

Sixty miles east of the Gerstle River testing grounds, the army selected a site near Delta Creek as a place to test bacterial disease agents in the open air. It was one of only two locations in the United States where germ-warfare organisms are acknowledged to have been released into the environment. In 1966 and 1967 the army's tests at Delta Creek sought to determine the effectiveness of the tularemia bacteria in subarctic conditions. Tularemia (after Tulare County, California, where it was first found) in insects, birds, fish, and water. It is an acute infectious disease related to bubonic plague. Onset symptoms occur suddenly and include extreme weakness, headache, recurring chills. and drenching sweats from high fever. Untreated, death occurs in about 6 percent of cases.

In one incident uncovered by the Alaskan scholar and investigative reporter Richard Fineberg, the army lost hundreds of rockets laden with an aggregate ton of lethal nerve gas. The rockets, which were slated to be destroyed, were stacked on a frozen lake in the winter of 1965. But, for some reason, the soldiers failed to retrieve the rockets before the spring thaw and they sank to the bottom of the lake, apparently forgotten. In a few years, with personnel turnover, the story of lethal nerve gas rockets lying at the bottom of one of the lakes in the military reserve slipped into local folklore. In 1969, a new commander at the test center followed on the rumors, however, and tracked the evidence to a lake about a mile from the Gerstle River facility. He ordered it pumped dry, and more 200 nerve-gas rockets—one leaking—were recovered. A small drop of stuff on the skin can kill a human being in minutes.

The military undertook a general "cleanup" of the Gerstle Test Site in 1970, though perhaps it is more accurate to say the contaminants were "consolidated." The army simply heaped up 4 million pounds of chemical munitions, gas masks, contaminated clothing, and equipment into two mounds and covered them with dirt. An attempt to transfer the "restored" land to the Bureau of Land Management resulted in declining the offer. The army cannot certify that the land is decontaminated because, as one historian has written, "when the program terminated in the late 1960s, records of the testing inexplicably disappeared and remain missing, apparently destroyed. What files remain confirm sloppy record-keeping which failed to identify the type of weapons being tested or how and when they were disposed of."

About Point Hope he made a sobering discovery that should be widely known and not forgotten:

> In the fall of 1992 the people of Point Hope painfully revisited the Chariot controversy. In August of that year I passed on to an official of the Point Hope village corporation, and to the Alaska Military Network, documents uncovered while researching this book. The letters and memoranda showed that before abandoning the Chariot camp, government scientists had buried nuclear waste near the site. Shortly, banner headlines in the *Anchorage Daily News*, Alaska's largest newspaper, proclaimed, NUCLEAR WASTE DUMP DISCOVERED: ARCHIVES REVEAL '60s CHUKCHI TEST SITE; OFFICIALS HUSTLE TO DETERMINE HAZARD. The thirty-year-old documents described how the Atomic Energy Commission had contracted with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to conduct experiments with radioactive tracers at the Chariot site. And they show that when the experiment was finished, the scientists illegally buried quantities of certain radioisotopes 1,000 times in excess of federal regulations. According to the documents, the AEC had asked the USGS to submit the funding proposal. And, the documents suggest, the experiment was not specifically related to Project Chariot, or even to Plowshare.
>
> ….The total amount of radioactivity, as reported in the documents, was twenty-six millicuries (twenty-six thousandths of one curie). However, there could have been as much as five curies of radiation transported to Ogotoruk Creek [a traditional hunting area of Point Hopers]; the USGS had asked the AEC for permission to transport that amount, and permission had been granted. Five curies would represent a third of the radiation that was said to have vented in the worst nuclear accident in U.S. history: the Three Mile Island mishap…..
>
> At the stream site, the men put five and a half pounds of contaminated soil, 3.2 millicuries of radioactivity, directly into the creek. Then they collected samples of the water at twenty, forty, and sixty feet down-stream to show the dispersal of the suspended particles and to measure the "resulting wave of radioactivity that passed downstream."
>
> To decontaminate the plots after the experiment, the men excavated the soggy soil and vegetation down to a depth where only background levels of radiation were detectable. This amount of contaminated earth, which now totaled about 15,000 pounds, they loaded into fifty-five-gallon drums and hauled to a spot midway between two of the plots. They dumped the din out of the drums and threw the contaminated boards into the pile. This heap measured about 4 feet high and covered about 400 square feet. The material could not be buried in a pit because even by August the soil had only thawed to a depth of about two feet. Instead, one of the equipment operators brought up a bulldozer from the camp and pushed about four feet of clean dirt over top of the waste pile. And then the scientists left.
>
> Of course, the 3.2 millicuries put into the stream was not recovered. Presumably the "wave of radioactivity" flowed down Snowbank Creek, into Ogotoruk Creek, and on down to the sea. Other scientists working at the Chariot camp were unaware of this fact, even though the camp's water supply – for drinking, cooking, and washing – came not from a well, but from Ogotoruk Creek.
>
> The radioactive material lay buried and forgotten for thirty years, almost exactly to the day. The site was not fenced or labeled or marked as off limits. No

one monitored it over the years even though the porous nature of the uncompacted mound "could have allowed the radionuclides to leach out with rainfall," according to a 1993 scientific review. No one had bothered to consult with the people of Point Hope about dumping nuclear waste on land they claimed. And no one told them of the dump's existence after the fact.

The disposal contravened the Code of Federal Regulations, which limited the quantities of specific isotopes that may be buried in soil. Specifically, the cesium 137 and strontium 85 "exceeded one thousand times the amounts specified" in the law, according to federal regulators. Also contrary to the federal code, said regulators, was the fact that "no records were maintained of the byproduct materials disposed of by burial." Finally, the disposal was in direct violation of the Department of the Interior permit that allowed the AEC to occupy the Cape Thompson region. That permit stated unequivocally that "nothing in this permit shall be construed to authorize the contamination of any portion of the lands...."

6.

Not a "pristine wilderness," Alaska, but a heartbreaking land that, after the wars, people are going to be cleaning up for a long, long time. Dan O'Neill writes of the great "contempt for the Arctic world" shown by American, and also Soviet, military and industrial adventurers. I would add that a twist of irony, an upending, a reversal of redemption to betrayal and back again, marks any true story of Alaska.

About four weeks after I left, Malfa and I talked by phone. In the course of the conversation she told me that a contract had just been signed for clearance and clean-up of Fort Greely to prepare it as a test site for the missile defense shield. Her son-in-law had been one of the negotiators. The construction firm of which he was part, a subsidiary of the NANA Regional Corporation, would begin work in late summer. She was suitably proud of him and pleased that a Native company had competed successfully for the job. But I remembered something else about him which I could not find a way to express, in view of what I had read about the contamination of Point Hope and Fort Greely. Her accomplished son-in-law was a grandson of the artist and journalist from Point Hope – his name is honored in Alaskan memory – who had organized statewide Native opposition to Project Chariot.

My friend the professor phoned to tell me Celia Hunter died on December 2. She was co-founder, former executive secretary, and principal spokesperson of the Alaska Conservation Society, opponent of Project Chariot, former national executive director of the Wilderness Society. According to one report, "The night before she died, Hunter was on the telephone compiling a list of senators who were on the fence regarding a scheduled vote Monday in the U.S. Senate about drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge."

Malfa's health continued to worry me and, with persistence, I finally talked to her in mid-month. She had been hospitalized for a week, she admitted, but then had come back to teach a workshop for Doyon, the huge Athabaskan corporation. Her class had been oil men: managers, whites, the first day; roustabouts, mostly Native, the second. Her topic: how they could work together despite their cultural differences. She laughed lightly and said she had enjoyed the roustabouts, because she knew how to get along with them. Since the price of crude was down, I asked why the oil companies were hiring. She said the men had told her they might not get hired right away but wanted the training, because the talk was, soon there were going to be lots of jobs in the Russian oilfields.

Coda

The year was 1983. A Haida lawyer who was the husband of a friend of mine came on business to Fairbanks, where I was living then, and we met for coffee. Subsistence rights – the word "subsistence" when used by Natives means "our way of life," including hunting and fishing for family and communal use in long-used territories – were as controversial and bitterly-fought an issue then as they are now. For some years I had lived and traveled in the Interior and had been shown aspects of that life that I thought should be made known. He suggested that I write a long essay on the ceremony of the hunt, because, he thought, I could do it accurately and with good intentions, and he arranged for a little grant from the BIA, "so you can keep body and soul together."

As a background to the essay, I was asked to attend a meeting in Anuktuvuk Pass, a Nunamiut (Inupiat) village in the Brooks Range. The village was enclosed by the Gates of the Arctic National Park, which was called the last great wilderness in our nation. The people there found suddenly that their widespread hunting lands had been placed under federal rule. Only part of their old territories remained open to them, and then only under close restrictions.

I had never gone so far north – into the fabled Brooks Range! With three agents from the BIA I caught the mail plane from Fairbanks to Bettles Field, where we met the connecting twin-engine mail plane to Anuktuvuk. Not long after takeoff, we entered the mountains.

The plane was nearly full. Along with the BIA staff and me there were two Park Service rangers, an Inupiaq translator, one or two local passengers, and the pilot and the co-pilot. All of them were old hands on the flight.

A long narrow pass opened between mountains that soared above us on both sides of the defile. From the window I could watch as crags and rocks, tones of color, shadows and light slipped behind us smoothly, at an easy pace. It had already been a long day, though it was just after lunch and still light. The other passengers dozed or looked lost in their own thoughts, and the translator buried his head in the Fairbanks paper.

The mountains were alive, sentient: eyes everywhere. One mountain was an enormous bear lying on is paws watching us. Its gaze was intelligent and slightly bemused. With a deep, slightly delayed, shock of acknowledgement, I looked at it and did a small double-take. It watched us. He was a bear. It was a mountain. He was a bear, mountain.

The plane pushed forward through the transparent air. I looked, then looked away, and back again. The bear looked at us. The plane flew steadily on into the depths of the mountains. They looked like mountains. I glanced at the translator, who had relatives in Anuktuvuk; he was still engrossed in his newspaper. The pilot never wavered on his course. In the cabin, no one moved in his seat. I had caught myself before crying out in surprise and felt calm and alert, but passive, as after a shock.

It occurred to me that it could have knocked us out of the sky with a flick of a paw. With an inward stutter, I thanked it for allowing the plane to pass, as it passed through every day. I wondered at, and was grateful for, the patience of the mountains.

I lost sight of it as the plane followed the curve of the pass. This was November; it was cold, about twenty-five degrees below zero. The village was set high in the mountains and surrounded by snow-covered peaks. The air was heady and bracing. That night, an aurora lit up the sky. People of the village and the visitors stood out and watched that

gorgeous dance of colors over the mountains. On their summits there are coral deposits, it is reported, left by the Flood. The old stories of those people record the time when an ocean covered the land.

For some time I had no words for what I had seen, only astonishment at how normal the appearance of that mountain bear had been: mountain/bear: mountain, bear. What I saw was no illusion; nor was it a formal resemblance. My mind was as clear as the day. The mountain did not "look like" a bear, as a geological formation sometimes resembles an identifiable shape. Writing it calls for the exact play of poetic logic, but in what language? For, what I saw was both at once, mountain, bear. In our metaphorical language, the sense of it could easily be lost.

Years passed before I mentioned what I had seen. I told it to Malfa. Until then I had not known how to tell it to anyone without sounding fantastic. To her, I just said it.

"Well," she said easily. "Maybe it was just letting you know who really owns that country."

-KM
(December 2001- January 2002)

Notes:

Malfa Ivanov: This is the name she has asked me to use; "In the Shelter of a Hill" is also a pseudonym. I have used pseudonyms in certain instances, to respect what privacy remains to people there.

[a]t issue is the capacity and tendency of a government agency to circumvent….: Dan O'Neill, THE FIRECRACKER BOYS, St. Martin' Press, 1994, p. 294.

"Let's imagine, for a moment, that the military was interested in our ideas…": Dan O'Neill, Fairbanks *Daily News-Miner*, Dec. 15, 1998. <http://www.nonukesnorth.net/O'Neill'scolumns.htm>

In 1962, the first "portable" nuclear power plant to be built in the field…: O'Neill, THE FIRECRACKER BOYS, op. cit., p. 270.

When the U.S. military considered where in the world to test deadly nerve gas…: O'Neill, ibid., pp. 274-5.

In the fall of 1992 the people of Point Hope painfully revisited the Chariot controversy….: O'Neill, ibid., pp. 277-80.

Not a "pristine wilderness," Alaska….: Dan O'Neill describes the "unwilling" participation of Alaska natives in a radiation experiment: "Project Chariot was intended, as Livermore officials said, to be a 'meaningful radioactivity experiment.'"

Furthermore, "it is known that Alaska native people, including people from Point Hope, had been subjects in radiation experiments carried out by the U.S. military in the same time period, the mid-1950s. More than 100 Eskimos and Indians from six villages in northern Alaska were given radioactive iodine as part of an experiment conducted by the Arctic Aeromedical Laboratory at Ladd Air Force Base in Fairbanks. Subjects were given single doses of up to sixty-five microcuries (sixty-five millionths of one curie) of iodine 131 in an attempt to evaluate the role of the thyroid inhuman acclimatization to cold. Many subjects were dosed more than once. By today's medical standards, only about six to ten microcuries are administered for diagnosis of thyroid anomalies. Healthy people, of course, do not receive any doses at all." O'Neill, ibid., p. 282.

He adds that in May 1993, Rep. George Miller (D-California) <http://www.house.gov/georgemiller/environment.html> "announced that the House Committee on Natural Resources would begin an investigation 'into government actions that exposed Native Americans, Native Alaskans, Pacific Islanders, and others to often lethal doses of radiation.'" (p. 284).

More generally, Rep. Bob Filner (D-California) has introduced the Military Environmental Responsibility Act (MERA) <http://www.house.gov/filner/mera.htm> to require the military to "uniformly comply with all environmental laws."

lots of jobs in the Russian oilfields: See, for instance, this article in a recent issue of the *Washington Post* <http://washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16787-2001Feb16.html> about an oligarch who wants to drill for oil in Siberia.

Books:

Katherine McNamara, NARROW ROAD TO THE DEEP NORTH (San Francisco: Mercury House <http://www.mercuryhouse.org>, 2001)

Dan O'Neill, THE FIRECRACKER BOYS. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994)

Selected references:
An enormous list of useful sites of information, analysis, and opinion relative to Alaska, NMD, ANWR, the Land Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), Native sovereignty, subsistence rights, and many other topics touched upon in this essay can be found on the web through Google searches. Listed below in no special order are a few sites I found useful or interesting.-*KM*

Norman Chance, "The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: A Special Report." <http://arcticcircle.uconn.edu/ANWR/anwrindex.html>

Alaska and Circumpolar Coalition against Missile Defense and the Weaponization of Space ("No Nukes North") – http://www.nonukesnorth.net/ "Welcome, and thank you for visiting this site. This group is nascent and the site is under construction, but the news needs to get out. Alaska is slated to stage a missile defense system: testing at Kodiak and Ground-Based Interceptors and Battle Command and Control at Fort Greely.

"One of the most important things Alaskans and all northerners can do is learn about the military's past abuses of northern regions that they perceived to be remote and unpopulated. The proposed Missile Defense system is slated to be built at Fort Greely, Alaska, next to the communities of Delta Junction, Big Delta and Clearwater. The Alaska Community Action on Toxins produced an in-depth investigative report on the nuclear reactor at Fort Greely with astonishing revelations. Visit their website and read the report at <http://www.akaction.net>.

Arctic Slope Regional Corporation <http://www.asrc.com/>

NANA Regional Corporation <http://www.nana.com/>

Delta Junction, Big Delta, Clearwater. http://www.alaska-highway.org/deltanewsweb/

Native group wins defense contract for Fort Greely Anchorage *Daily News*, Aug. 20, 2001 – <http://www.adn.com/alaska/story/663372p-706196c.html>

Dan O'Neill's columns on the missile defense shield <http://www.nonukesnorth.net/O'Neill'scolumns.htm> and in the Fairbanks *Daily News-Miner* <http://www.news-miner.com/>

Celia Hunter's columns in the Fairbanks *Daily News-Miner* <http://www.news-miner.com/> should be archived in February 2002.

Previous Endnotes:
Sasha Choi Goes Home, Vol. 5, No. 3
Sasha Choi in America, Vol. 5, No. 2
A Local Habitation and A Name, Vol. 5, No. 1
The Blank Page, Vol. 4, No. 4
The Poem of the Grand Inquisitor, Vol. 4, No. 3
On the Marionette Theater, Vol. 4, Nos. 1/2
The Double, Vol. 3, No. 4

Folly, Love, St. Augustine, Vol. 3, No. 3
On Memory, Vol. 3, No. 2
Passion, Vol. 3, No. 1
A Flea, Vol. 2, No. 4
On Love, Vol. 2, No. 3
Fantastic Design, with Nooses, Vol. 2, No. 1
Kundera's Music Teacher, Vol. 1, No. 4
The Devil's Dictionary; Economics for Poets, Vol. 1, No. 3
Hecuba in New York; Déformation Professionnelle, Vol. 1, No. 2
Art, Capitalist Relations, and Publishing on the Web, Vol. 1, No. 1

Recommended Reading

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> Whatever the field under discussion, those who engage in debate must not only believe in each other's good faith, but also in their capacity to arrive at the truth. Intellectual debate is only possible between those who are equal in learning and intelligence. Preferably, they should have no audience, but if they do have one, it should be an audience of their peers. Otherwise, the desire for applause, the wish, not to arrive at the truth but to vanquish one's opponent, becomes irresistible.
>
> W.H. Auden
> THE PROTESTANT MYSTICS

&&&&&&

The Indian Quarries of Piney Branch Park (Washington, D.C.)

Anthony Baker

It is an old and majestic forest. The leaves of summer mute the rush of traffic on Piney Branch Parkway in the District of Columbia. One thousand years ago this sylvan glade in Piney Branch Park was an active stone quarry. Much of the ground was a jumble of debris mounds and open pits. For generations, the Nacotchtanks and allied tribes harvested boulders of quartzite dug from the hillsides. From that rock they fashioned knives, arrow points, and tools for domestic use.

Soon after the arrival of European colonists, the quarry was abandoned by Native Americans and remained dormant until an archaeological investigation was undertaken by the Smithsonian Institution in the 1890s. Under the direction of William Henry Holmes, the Bureau of Ethnology excavated portions of the quarry. Because it was a quarry, the Bureau's archaeologists found and studied workshop artifacts in all stages of the manufacturing process, adding greatly to the technical knowledge of how stone tools were made. Importantly, analysis of these artifacts would put to rest the popular notion of an American Paleolithic, or Old Stone Age.

The earliest inhabitants of the District of Columbia discovered quartzite boulders exposed at random in stream beds and on foot trails. Cobbles of a finer grain and a thin cross section were easier to flake, and in Piney Branch Park ancient geology had set them in place by the thousands. Carried down from the mountains of antiquity, rounded and smoothed by tumbling, the quartzite cobbles of Piney Branch were quarried by the aboriginal explorers from the ancient banks of the mighty river that shaped them long ago.

The production goals of the quarry worker were thin, leaf-shaped quartzite blades. These roughed-out quarry blanks were carried home to village sites, further reduced in size, sharpened by further thinning, and then styled into a variety of edged tools.

The first official report of worked stone at Piney Branch was published in the 1880s by the United States Geological survey. Florida Avenue was then the city boundary, and Fourteenth Street, extended, was the access route to the quarry. Fourteenth "Road," as it was called then, followed the approximate route of present-day Ogden Street, spanning Piney Branch stream by means of a narrow bridge. Obtaining permission from the landowner, Thomas Blagden, Holmes began his archaeological investigation on the bluffs above Piney Branch Stream northwest of Fourteenth Road extended. (This rough, narrow road was soon to be straightened, made grand and wide, and renamed Sixteenth Street.) With the exception of sporadic forays into the woods by street contractors to obtain gravel, the property was undeveloped and heavily wooded. Photographs of the era show it looking much as it does today.

The hill above Piney Branch Stream is very steep. Climbing to the top, one passes over deer paths that hug the slope horizontally. Gaps in the tree branches frame a high-rise apartment building and the stone arch of the Sixteenth Street Bridge. Flakes of stone worked by the Indians poke from the soil in profusion; quartzite cobbles by the hundred dot the landscape.These stones are but a clue on the surface to what lies below in numberless profusion.

Holmes and his crew dug six ribbon-like trenches that began below the bluff in the narrow but precipitous ravine, ran the hilltop, then continued down the other side, ending close to present-day Crestwood Drive. The trenches were transverse to the bluff so that the broadest view of the quarry workings could be obtained. They did reach their goal, the quarry face. The stones at the working face were held tightly in place by compacted riverine gravel and sand. Holmes proposed that the natives harvested the stone by undermining sections using wooden levers, pickaxes of deer antler, and tools of bone. Temporary camps to house the native workers were built on level sections of the hilltop.

The attributes that designate a stone quarry became apparent immediately. Cobbles with chunks knocked off to determine quality, waste flakes, blades broken in the manufacturing process, partially formed and unfinished rejects cast away as unsuitable were found by the bushel. It was these rude implements that were of importance to Holmes. Notable scholars of American antiquity were convinced that implements of such primitive form were analogous to European artifacts dating to the Old Stone Age. Perhaps, thought some, the owners of these so-called tools lived on this continent tens of thousands of years before the "modern Indian" appeared. W.J. McGee, writing in The American Anthropologist of July 1889, asserts: "It seems probable indeed that the quartzite paleoliths of Rock creek were made long before the days of the arrow-makers whose relics skirt the shores of the Potomac and Anacostia."

In the same issue, Thomas Wilson elaborates by accompanying his article with photographs and sketches of these "Paleolithic implements." Confidently, he states: "Paleolithic implements from the District of Columbia, indeed from all over the United States, are always chipped, never polished; are almond-shaped, oval, or sometimes approaching a circle; the cutting edge is at or towards the smaller end and not, as during the Neolithic period, towards the broad end. They are frequently made of pebbles, the original surface being sometimes left unworked in places, sometimes at the butt for a grip, sometimes on the flat or bottom side, and sometimes, in the cases of these pebbles, on both sides."

Wilson's paragraph is an apt description of much of the quarry debris scattered on the hillside at Piney Branch, but – this was important – he was off by about one hundred thousand years in suggesting they belonged to the Old Stone Age, and he was wrong in assuming that they were actual tools. He overlooked that fact that reducing a cantaloupe-sized boulder to a practical spear point requires great skill. Quartzite chips with difficulty. Once an initial leaf-shape is roughed out, this lens-shaped form (picture an almond enlarged by a factor of ten) is further reduced by striking off long, thinning flakes with a rock or a baton of deer antler. The minimum acceptable width-to-thickness ratio for an effective projectile point of quartzite is about four to one. Much thicker than that and it will not fly, and it will not slice. Thousands of ungainly "pre-tools" litter the hillside at Piney Branch, and many of them do indeed have the attributes of the chopping, smashing, hand-ax tools carried by our early ancestors.

The Smithsonian was intrigued by the possibility of an American Paleolithic. It issued a "Circular Concerning the Department of Antiquities" querying readers for information on "rude or unfinished implements of the paleolithic type." This circular (No.

36) contained drawings of sample "Paleolithic" artifacts, and was mailed to professionals, learned societies, amateur archaeologists, and artifact collectors. The inquiries in Circular 36 netted hundreds of replies, and many correspondants sent the Smithsonian their "Paleolithic artifacts" for further study. Now we know that archaeologists have pushed back the time line of the aboriginal settlement of the Americas, but they have found no evidence that even the earliest inhabitants devised their tools on these continents. The earliest Americans arrived with tools in hand, and these tools were of the Neolithic type.

Today those who replicate the stone tools of the past are called flintknappers, and there are trade journals, conventions, and Internet sites devoted to the avocation. In Victorian America, the knowledge of stone tool technology was in its infancy, despite the fact that in that age of exploration, stone-age societies were being observed and documented. Observing and documenting is always one step behind the practice of doing, and the mechanics behind fracturing stone did not become widely known until archaeologists began experimenting on their own.

Piney Branch Quarry was a grand laboratory. It was accessible and very large, and the stone supply was abundant quartzite. The malformed, rejected, and broken implements were so numerous that Holmes, director of the Bureau of Ethnology's dig, could establish a chronology of the reduction process. He experimented, by following the step-by-step process evidenced by quarry finds, and then reported: "I have found that in reaching one final form I have left many failures by the way, and that these failures duplicate, and in proper proportions, all the forms found on the quarry site." In a testament to enthusiasm, he wrote further: "I was unfortunately prevented from carrying out these experiments as full as desirable by permanently disabling my left arm in attempting to flake a bowlder of very large size."

In 1897 the Smithsonian published the "Fifteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology." Contained within was a lengthy, superbly-illustrated work titled "Stone Implements of the Potomac-Chesapeake Tidewater Province," by William Henry Holmes. This master work of quarry-site investigation and lithic analysis won the Loubat Prize **as** the most important work in American Archaeology of the preceding three years.

But his work did not end with excavating Piney Branch Quarry. A quarter-mile north of the Naval Observatory, now the location of the Vice-President's house, Holmes investigated another Native quartzite quarry. "Although hardly beyond the city limits [he wrote], this site still retains the extreme wildness of a primitive forest and is penetrated by obscure trails only. The sound of the hammer is now constantly heard, however, even in the wildest spots, and suburban avenues threaten it on all sides."

Surely Holmes was pleased when Rock Creek Park was established in 1890. It is now a grand city park of almost eighteen hundred acres. Piney Branch Park is a stone's throw from the bustle of the city. There, the handwork of the original inhabitants of the District of Columbia still covers the ground in abundance: it is our museum in the woods.

Getting there: The quartzite quarries are a few hundred feet west of the Sixteenth Street Bridge, on the north side. If you drive west on Piney Branch Parkway, you come to a traffic turnout just beyond the bridge. You can park there and walk directly into the woods. Good places to spot the quarry debris are in the roots of upturned trees and in the deep ravine where stone has eroded out the sides. Remember, however, that it is illegal to remove archaeological materials from public lands.

Photographs from Piney Creek Park

above: On the left are two quarry rejects; on the right, two projectile point parts, a tip and a base, broken in the process of manufacturing. They were photographed on site against a white backdrop.

left: On the ground in Piney Creek Park lie exposed cobbles, flakes, and rejects.
above: A roughly-shaped cobble typical of many quarry rejects at the site. Because of its similarity to early stone-age artifacts found in Europe, it helped give rise to the belief that "ancient man" lived in the Americas before American Indians. This tool could not be reduced by thinning. It was already far too thick for its width and was therefore thrown away. The photo was taken on site against a white backdrop.

Photos Anthony Baker

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W.J. McGee, "The Geologic Antecedents of Man in the Potomac Valley," *The American Anthropologist*, Vol. 2, No. 3 July 1889, pp. 227-235.

Thomas Wilson, "Results of an Inquiry as to the Existence of Man in North America During the Paleolithic Period of the Stone Age," Annual Report of the National Museum, 1888, pp. 677-702.

_____, "Paleolithic Period in the District of Columbia," *The American Anthropologist*, Vol. 2, No. 3 July 1889, pp. 235-241.

"Circular (No. 36) Concerning the Department of Antiquities," cited in Wilson, "Results of an Inquiry as to the Existence of Man in North America…," *op. cit.*

Fifteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1893-94. Washington, D. C.: Gov't Printing Office, 1897.

Note: The original Fifteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology is a handsome, splendid book, but it is long out of print. You can order one through an out-of-print book service but will have to spent $150.00 for a decent copy. I would buy THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WILLIAM HENRY HOLMES, cited above. The article "Stone Implements of the Potomac-Chesapeake Tidewater Province" – first published in the Fifteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology – appears in this volume in its entirety.

(Anthony Baker <timshelbks@earthlink.net> lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he is a builder and the owner of a bookstore on-line specializing in volumes on American Indians. His "Flintknapping" appeared in Archipelago*, Vol. 4, No. 4.)*

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