Mother and Child (Woodcut print)

Betsy Buurma
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**dialogue**

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I remember Tom Burnett from school.  
He played hockey on the local team;  
Goalie, I think,  
And smoked cigarettes down in the trees by the creek,  
With the other guys  
Who were O.K. but sometimes got in trouble.  
And I remember when he came over to my house one day.  
Two worlds,  
That existed for me  
Separately,  
Came together  
In confusion.  

Tom lived only three country miles from me,  
With few farms and even fewer kids between us,  
Which put me in biking range,  
The only one—in days before ten speeds, mopeds,  
And mothers who consented to playing taxi.  

"Can I come over some time?"  
He would ask because I wouldn't ask him,  
"Play some catch or do some stuff."  
"Sure, you ought to come over some time,"  
I'd say, answering a question he hadn't asked,  
Hoping he wouldn't notice,  
And would give up on going home with me.  

Home wasn't for Tom Burnett  
He belonged to a different world.  
Home was where Oom Derk and Tante Bet  
And sometimes even Oom Jan and Tante Riek,  
Though they weren't our favorite relatives,  
Came over for Koffie after Church on Sundays,  
And where the minister and elder  
Came punctually once a year  
For huisbezoek,  
Which opened and closed with prayer  
And was filled with coffee, cake, and questions  
in between.  

Home was where we prayed before and after every meal,  
Even breakfast.  
And Mom,  
Who ate breakfast twice,  
First with us before we went to school  
And then again with Dad,  
Prayed four times each morning  
And read the same piece from the Family Altar  
Twice in a row, with equal reverence.  

And home was where we took Saturday night baths  
So we'd be clean for Church next day,  
And then watched the hockey game,  
While Mom cooked soup for Sunday's dinner.  

And home was where Dad came in for koffie drinken  
In the middle of the morning  
And again in the middle of the afternoon,  
When there were cookies or sometimes cake,
Coffee for the older ones,  
And hot chocolate for the younger ones;  
And we all sat around the kitchen table and talked,  
And sometimes Oom Derk would be there,  
And maybe cousin Bob and Jim,  
If they were helping Dad  
Pitch manure from the calf pens  
Or cut brush along the laneway that day.  
But school was where everything was always clean  
But never gezellig like Mom said it was at home,  
And where we ate at big, long tables  
In a big, cold, noisy room  
Lunches that never tasted quite like when Mom had made them,  
From lunchboxes that always smelled a little,  
And where no one prayed before they ate  
Or read the Bible or Family Altar afterwards.  
School was where no one spoke Dutch,  
But where everyone spoke that four-letter word  
(Though always just at recess),  
The one I didn’t know the meaning of  
And had to ask,  
And still didn’t understand when I found out.  
And school was where no one ever went to Church  
But where the Bible was read every morning over the P.A.  
While I looked down shame-faced  
And the other kids talked and whispered and laughed.  
School was for Tom Burnett.  
That was the world he belonged to.  
School was where the elect and the Canadeese  
Could mix together and no one would know;  
Where we were like spies  
Because we knew that they were Canadeese  
But they didn’t know we weren’t.  
Tom Burnett at home would have been as strange  
As the minister and elder op huisbezoek at school  
But one day, Tom came by unexpectedly.  
I met him at the door.  
"Let’s play outside," I said,  
Closing the door  
Firmly  
Behind me.  
"Why?" he asked.  
"Cause it’s more fun," I replied,  
Running out ahead of him  
With my glove and baseball.  
Two hours we stood on the lawn:  
I, with my too-small glove  
Which when the ball happened to land inside it  
Stung my hand  
Like Mr. Hall, the principal’s strap,  
But mostly just missed the ball  
So that I had to run after it awkwardly;  
And he, with his legs spread far apart,  
His arms hanging limply by his side,  
Waiting for me to get the ball,  
Catching the ball, throwing it back to me,  
And waiting again,  
Despondently.  
Two hours,  
He pretended to be enjoying himself,
We Were Ourselves
Snow falls; close and plain, a monographic hue.
Above and below in framed canvas shells
Skies with too-blue promise move.
The earth apart does stand
A sober reminder of sound browns.

Where did they go those lovely Spring mornings?
And how can we ever hope to forget
As leaves tumble slowly and earthbound die.
What beauty can in early sunrise lie?
Why suckle Cold's wild emotions and let
Our soul deny the peace that Warmth's ray brings?

Snow falls; close and plain, a monographic hue.
Warm blanket, curtain to the future
Cold dust, grave of the past.

—Philip Rose

Pieces of Pastel
After it rains
and periwinkle dewdrops
add sparkle to everything
a pastel rainbow
of powdered blue and palest pink
arches over frail wildflowers
in fragrant, lacy shadows
of the woods.

After it snows
and apple-blossom snowflakes
glimmer in the twilight
a pastel sunset
of fragile rose and fading azure
lingers behind silhouetted trees,
casting winter's icy shadows
through the woods.

—Betsy Buurma

Fragment #2
Some fishermen fish for fish,
And others fish for dreams, for solitude;
Which group is wisest, I can't say—
One may find peace, the other, food.

—Joy Kerkstra
I happened to notice that I was about ten minutes late as I sauntered into Hiemenga 117 for Professor Rechtig's required but outside-of-classtime presentation on writing about literature. But he received and would receive no humble look or apology from me. After all, it was undoubtedly costly and inconvenient for me to have to leave work at the Fulton Street Market thirty minutes early to drive six miles back to school through the dusk and some patches of dense fog in the low areas near Reeds Lake. And after spending most of the afternoon trying to convince some nitpicking old ladies that I could select a sweet muskmelon merely by examining its exterior and others that our Santa Rosa plums were sweet to the pit, it was embarrassing to sit with hands smelling of fruits and vegetables in a rabble composed mostly of freshman girls.

In addition, Professor Rechtig was anything but my favorite teacher. Early in the semester he had irritated me by insisting that I move from the back of the room, where I had been able to enjoy a daydream or two, to the front of the class. "Those who sit near the front have better chances of not missing anything," the little man with the perennially smudged glasses had chirped. Since then he had asked me numerous questions, all of which I viewed as insultingly easy to answer. And just yesterday he had refused my request to be exempted from his lecture on "Six Ways to Write a Critical Paper." I could conceive of no good reason for me to attend. For I had already achieved sophomore status, had taken an interim course in literature, and had explicated and deconstructed at least four or five poems. Thus, with facial expression and posture, I tried to make patently clear to Professor Rechtig that I was uncomfortable in my seat, angry with him, and indifferent to his topic.

But I couldn't avoid hearing one of his remarks, and by chance it piqued my curiosity. He mentioned that if we judged ourselves capable critics and had a great deal of courage, we could attempt what he called a "philosophical paper." That is, we could select a particular literary masterpiece and examine it from various philosophical perspectives. But he issued a stern warning. Only two or three freshmen and sophomores in twenty-seven years, he noted, had ever written a paper even remotely approaching philosophical profundity.

That settled the matter for me. I heard not a word about the other options. A philosophical paper it had to be. And on a challenging play—Ibsen's The Wild Duck, a work that had led nearly all of my classmates to testify during discussions that they believed that they and all of mankind desperately needed illusions about themselves and their lives in order to cling to some shreds of sanity.

Naturally, I took the opposite position. And I made my thesis clear enough for even the most unsophisticated reader. On page one I elaborated on why mankind had to face truth. On page two I discussed why mankind needed to confront reality. On page three I went into detail on why mankind had to flee delusions. On page four I expatiated on why mankind should face the facts. And so on, ending with a rhetorical flourish after five more pages. Throughout, I might add, I included several fascinating specific examples to support my philosophical claims, all of them describing the tragic consequences of my friends' frequent failures to face up to reality.

Professor Rechtig took nearly five weeks to get our papers back to us. As the time passed, my initial reactions were irritation and impatience. But the more I thought about it, the more that period of time seemed reasonable; he needed adequate time to ponder the philosophy. When he handed me my paper, I nonchalantly turned to the last page and glanced at the grade: B+.

Wrong paper, I assumed. But it wasn't, and when I saw him in his office two hours later I was still fuming.

"B+ That's too low! I remind you that this is a philosophical paper. Besides, I'm planning to declare an English major and go on to grad school and teach literature someday and spend my life helping students see truth more clearly. I simply could not have gotten a B+!"

"Well, in this case I think it would be wisest for me to let it stand."

"But a B+! I deserve an A! When did you grade this? Why a B+?"

And then with the slightest curl of his upper lip he replied: "Although I try to be as realistic as possible in my grading, I sometimes find with certain individuals that it's best to foster illusions."
The rag man was the most foul looking creature that walked the elm-lined streets then. He drew attention not so much by the carnival aura of his rag wagon, nor by his own peculiarly ugly features—a large, misshapen round head as if fluids were pulsing against the pink and scarred flesh like an overripe cantaloupe ready to burst—but also by the horse which drew his wagon and which immediately marked him, even to young eyes free for the time from the lessons of history that accompanied time’s turning, as a splay-footed intrusion of the past upon our remarkably free and airy present. The rag man was missing several front teeth so that when he went down the street crying as if his heart were breaking, “Rags, Ho! Rags,” the words died away in a gasp of unstopped breath.

Even now I can see his beard, wet from spittle and perspiration, as he walked alongside the wagon, never on it out of deference to the lurching stagger of the horse that steamed through an empty oats bag which flagged and bellowed with each wheezing breath. The houses on our end of town spilled along small hills, a joy for sledding in winter, but an agony for the rag man as he wound a circuitous route to the summit of Kalamazoo Avenue. There were those who believed his route was patterned according to planned pick-up stops. If anyone had taken the time to watch they would have recognized that it was to circumnavigate the hills.

As young boys in the early middle decade of our century we had time in abundance to make such keen observations on the state of our narrow world. I say early middle decade because what was to become to the history books “The Fifties,” decade of progress and growth, decade of death to the old ways and yearly birth to the new—from racier fins on Cadillacs to shorter skirts on girls, was to us all time and no time, an indeterminate period known as growing-up which occurs to all people without their knowing it, sempiternal, endless, until it is past and replaced by the gentle rue of nostalgia.

Strange it is that to many history is a bad thing, sodden with horrors that accumulate in thick books, and nostalgia is a good thing. Nostalgia is the way one person lived through a time during which history occurred in newspapers that one could avoid reading. Nostalgia was Life magazine and the Saturday Evening Post which enveloped history with popular culture and cartoons and thereby subdued it. Nostalgia was the rag man whose voice rasped above the broadcast of another losing Tigers’ game and thereby diminished our woe. He had a high set of bone thin legs on top of which hunched a bent and shrivelled peanut of a body. All
seemed screwed upward toward that fat ball of his misshapen head.

Early morning in June, along Kalamazoo Avenue, the heat flagged the tar street and the air smelled like swamps. A creek ran along the base of the hill, sometimes dipping underground where someone thought to place drainage pipes, then popping up into a grove of willow and maple which clumped around the far corners of an empty lot behind the doctor’s office. When it rained the creek simply spread out a brown, greasy blanket wherever it chose to wander. It hadn’t rained for several weeks, but the creek left a residue of sweet odor that reached into the June morning like a hand. We snuffed deep, filling our lungs. It was a sweet mustiness, like school hallways before the bell rings, and held our summer from the last bell in June to the first in September.

Our routine that summer, I realize now through the beneficent screen of nostalgia, was circumscribed by its own kind of schedule. Through questions like—What do you want to do now? Play some ball?—we pretended we were free and easy; but even freedom gains significance only by boundaries, by questions. What do you want to do now? We didn’t have to do anything, beyond chores which, with the browning lawns of mid-June, were minimal. Thereby the ritual of what we did gained terrible importance. If someone didn’t show up at the asphalt playground of the school at the top of Kalamazoo Avenue to play ball, it was a catastrophe of major proportions, akin only to a prolonged rain which mazed life out of meaningful sequence.

Life revolved around the daily ballgame as surely as a strong, sweet fly clearing the playground fence revolved the runner around bases stone-cut in the blacktop. From the first lazy haze of morning to the last thin light of dusk, it was baseball, interrupted when we liked by a walk to Hazenburg’s drugstore for orange drinks or to lounge under the maple trees that fringed the playground.

There we recalled the great games, our own and those of the Tigers whose glory of nearly two decades before burned on in our minds as if we had been there. And in a sense we were as we studied old magazines, ball cards, and programs our parents had thoughtfully preserved. They were our scripture; our guide to the immortal glory which was renewed each summer. If anyone had asked us what we wanted to do with our lives, a question seldom asked in that less pressing time, the answer would have been in unison: play for the Tigers. Meanwhile we invested in baseball cards of present teams and recounted the past lions of the throbbing coliseums. The great games were living things for us, and they stretched back to the arly thirties.

That was where it all started for us; the great path which led from the Tigers to our playground and the unavoidable hope of future conjunction. We pumped parents and grandparents for details, for key plays, for what the players looked like; and where they failed we filled in the gaps with our imaginations.

It began in 1934 when the Tigers lost it all to the Cards in seven, despite the elastic genius of Eldon Auker, Charley Gehringer and Rip Collins battled each other for hits; Collins with his eye ever on the fence smashed balls like meteors blazing in white heat, Gehringer with his hard raps punctuated balls through the infield like short, hard exclamation marks. The Tigers lost; but their era had begun.

In 1935 it was up against the Cubs. No one called them “Cubbies” then. They weren’t objects of affection even to Chicago fans. They were awesome, and when Leon Goose Goskin and the Tigers beat them in six in ‘35 it was a victory which would lighten fans through all the coming darkness. For a new force had arisen on the horizon, one that was to overshadow the game for years to come: the flawless, immaculate Yankees. For years thereafter it was all Yankees, except for the heartbreaking Tiger loss in 1940 to the Reds in seven. But even that tragic series, one of the greatest combinations of slugging power and pitching genius ever performed, was dimmed by the national tragedy of World War II. The Cubs and Tigers had a rematch in 1945. Big Hank Greenberg was one of the last of the old glory boys, and even though the series was riddled with errors and ballpark comedy, a vestige of glory returned with Hank when the Tigers took it in seven. There were new heroes, Hal Newhouser, Trout, but the glory years had departed. The Yanks became, win or lose, the kings of summer and lords of autumn. Year after year throughout the fifties it was the Yanks. The Tigers often played nobly; just not well enough. So we recounted past glory like grim aspirants of a dethroned monarch.

I think it was a custom everywhere in our small community that one took a break at ten in the morning. From the maple tree, where we took ours, we could see into the backyards across the street where housewives were hanging wash. This, we were to learn later from history books, was also the post-war baby boom. At the time it signified only clotheslines sagging under copious burdens of wash, legs of stiff bluejeans snapping capitously in the breeze as if longing to be on running legs, fields of white sheets that would hold the scent of
the wind for days thereafter, diapers, underwear, unmentionables. The sheets popped in the breeze like firecrackers. The women pinned with wooden pegs they held in their mouths like bullets, or stood along lot-lines demarcated by clumps of arbor vitae and small white fences, washbaskets on their hips, chatting animatedly with neighbors. But at ten o’clock they set things aside, called up the street to each other, and enjoyed a ritual unsurpassed in its luxury of human kindness.

About that time the rag man appeared like an awkward scar at the street corner. One heard the ringing clomp of the horse punch the morning full of clatter, the creak of rusted axles and bearings, and finally the winding call, “Rags, Ho! Rags.”

Ladies rose from their coffee if they had discovered garments in their washing too tattered for further service and deposited them on the groaning wagon. “Rags! Ho.”

On Fridays, and only on Fridays, the wagon bore a different burden; rows of carefully arranged fruit and vegetables. The call changed, “Fresh fruit! Vegetables,” although “vegetables” never made the full call and squeezed together in a dying gasp that sounded like “Vegals!” I wondered, in younger years, what the strange thing vegals was. Carrots in glittering orange layers, tremendous heads of cauliflower, almost obscene in their grotesque bulges. They reminded us of the rag man and few could eat it without thinking of his bulbous, distorted head. “You’re eating his nose,” my sister once said, and I grew sick. And others on the his bulbous, distorted head. “You’re eating his nose,”

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Often the rag man, if he arrived early for coffee time, would pause by the elderly widow whose house stood atop the hill and alongside the asphalt playground. They made an odd trio on the front porch; the spindly little lady with her white apron, the swaying thick body of her retarded younger sister, and the rag man who leaned back in the rocker as if his thin undercarriage failed to support him.

After a break the playground beckoned. We sported battered gloves of the dollar-ninety-five variety from Sears. Some pockets were stitched with clothesline rope. When a cover tore on the baseball, black electrical tape sufficed. After hard games strings splunged out around the tape. The ball was then an unhittable mass, a monster defying the bat.

Two boys, Rick and Leonard, had summer birthdays. We looked forward to them with communal interest. They promised our two new balls for the season, and by the time the last was worn to a bruised pulp, summer had lurched into the last bell clanging from the red brick school along whose walls we wore out the days.

Occasionally we lost balls. Behind the far fence, indisputable home run range, squatted the small white house in which lived the widow and her retarded sister, although that word wasn’t in our vocabulary then. We called her idiot and thought neither better nor worse of her for that. She was seldom seen. Sometimes we saw her face pressed against the pane of a picture window fronting the playground. A whisper went around then. We shivered shagging line drives toward right field. Into the summer the line drives grew harder, the fly balls higher. At one such point I hit a magnificent fly that carried like a fine white dove, easily, soaring. We stood and watched. We knew we were watching history in the making, a truly memorable hit. I can remember the sweet snap of the bat; the sound reverberates as clear as a baby’s first word. The ball held, spun, High. Higher. Then a long, lofting arch downward, gathering speed not like a dove but like a hawk’s plunge. It cleared the fence not by a paltry foot or two, but high and with force. It shattered the picture window of the widow’s house about an inch off dead center. It was a full minute before anyone moved. And then it was the widow. She held the ball in her hand as she walked out of the house. She shook it at us, without a word. She turned and walked jerkily back in the house. She moved like a skinny little bag of sticks. Minutes later she came out with her idiot sister, holding a white towel to her head which was spotted with blood. They clumped off down the street to the doctor’s office at the base of Kalamazoo hill.

There was nothing for it but to trudge up to Hazenburg’s Drug Store where a nickle bought sweet, cool orange drink, dispensed out of a building machine with frost beads on the glass container. Sometimes a particularly sweet piece of fruit—not necessarily an orange—first bursting on the tongue reminds me of that orange drink. The drug store had a jukebox, but it was seldom played and then by the fountain girl, a freshman in high school, to demonstrate her vast social superiority over us. She played slow, romantic ballads of the type by Eddie Fisher which I don’t particularly recall. A quarter bought three plays. Once we played a song by Eddie Cochran three time in a row to spite her; but that was, in our estimation, a waste of either five orange drinks or five packs of ball cards. Even if you had the cards, the gum was good and of generous proportion.

Another ball was lost once in less spectacular
fashion. Rich was a vicious cut hitter with the bat. He had no swing, no extension. He simply hacked viciously at the ball. The result was usually a cruel grounder, but spaced frequently by fouls. One foul careened straight upward, held as if spinning in its own tight little orbit near the school roof, then lipped over the roof edge and disappeared. It was a tough loss with no redeeming qualities.

With our second loss we had to pitch in to buy a new ball to make it through the summer. Even then balls were expensive: 79¢ at Hazenburg's.

A few days later a work crew appeared to resurface the roof on the three-story school with tar. We lounged under the maple tree, listened to the rag man winding his voice into the vacancy of Kalamazoo Avenue, and watched the asphalt crew raise three-sectioned ladders against the school. The men disappeared over its ledge. Within minutes, a ball, our ball, thudded on the playground. Three more balls followed. We handled each as a priceless treasure, a literal gift from above but ones marked by a keen sense of mysterious history. It dawned on us slowly that others—how many others!—had played in this lot before us, had fouled balls, had thunked gloves, had lounged under the maple in the heat of midmorning. Perhaps they had been here when one of the great games was played, imagining themselves to be Greenberg legging out a hard grounder.

But no one, we believed, had cleared the fence and destroyed the widow's window in such spectacular fashion. And the joy of receiving the lost ball was counterpointed by the widow who held back the one sure ball. She grew in our minds as a kind of fragile ogre, too small to actually fear but large enough to dislike. In young boys that combination often evokes an odd cruelty which is incomprehensible to our adult reflection. We dreamed wicked schemes to spite her. The picture of her coming out, holding the ball in her skinny hand, and jerking defiantly back into her little shelter expanded each time it passed through our minds. We plotted once a raid on her home and discarded it in favor of a meaner trick. By night we collected fresh dog droppings in a brown bag, crept to her front porch with our sodden, stinking package, doused it with gasoline siphoned from my father's Ford, and in one quick motion lit the bag, rang the doorbell, and dove for a grove of bushes across the street which afforded a damp if secluded view. The bag guttered in a fitful flame. At length, far too long, the widow came to the door in a night coat. Instead of stamping on the bag as we expected, she simply stared long and sadly at its dying light. We could see the heaviness on her face perfectly. She didn't move. The pounding in our hearts heaved to a slow sadness. At length she closed the door. We started then as one. All noticed her sister's fat
face pressed against the window. Her eyes seemed to 
bore directly through us and worm into our very hearts. It 
was a long time before we crept out of the bushes.

We consoled ourselves with the extra balls we had 
received and tried to put the scene out of our minds. We 
couldn't. We studiously hit ground balls, and they had 
little punch to them. No one wanted to clear the fence. 
Without that, there is no baseball. The game is a long 
expectancy for a few moments of glorious fulfillment. By 
mid-July we gathered more often at Hazenburg's than 
the ball-field. The fountain girl was sympathetic and 
sometimes drew us a free orange drink, but that was 
seldom and only when Mr. Hazenburg was out of the 
store.

We were there one morning, sitting at the fountain, 
feeling the heat press against the screen door and worm 
into the drugstore, when we heard the rag man's wagon 
blistering under the hot sun. There was no cry; only the 
groan of the axle, the shriek of tortured bearings, and the 
awkward clomp of the horse arching into the drugstore 
on the heels of the heat. A car spun by outside and 
honked its horn. The clomp of the horse stopped 
suddenly outside the drugstore; we could hear the horse 
wheezing. Then the rag man himself stood at the door, 
his grotesque shadow filling its constricted space. The 
fountain girl puttered nervously at the counter with a 
wash rag. A bead of sweat popped out on her neck as 
she worked on the vinyl counter top, digging a bit of 
grease out of the metal edging. She stopped altogether 
and watched with us.

The rag man swayed at the doorway like a puppet 
with tangled strings. Slowly he pushed the door open 
and walked to the counter. He stood before me then in a 
picture I'll never forget; the troubled anxiety that worked 
behind his vacant eyes, the terrifying attempt at a smile. 
I remember it as an act of courage I've seldom seen 
duplicated. And I remember it now as a gentleness that 
was unfathomable. In his hand he held a baseball and a 
crumpled bit of paper. He held the hand out to me, but all 
his energy seemed turned to something he wanted to 
say. I reached for the ball and paper but his fingers 
weren't prepared to release them. My hand drew back, 
sweaty and limp. A sudden fire leaped into his eyes and 
bored through mine, crashing finally against the base of 
my skull. The scars on his face whitened as if burning.

"My sis'r wans see you," he said. Then he added, 
"Please," and dropped the ball and paper in my lap. He 
turned awkwardly, bent in his ungainly shuffle, and left. 
The minute the ball touched my fingers I knew it 
wasn't mine. The stitching was tight, the hide smooth 
and hard as a jewel. I held it up and the names 
autographed on the ball leaped through twenty years of 
history. Hank Greenberg was etched across a white 
space like a caterpillar's crawl. Below it was: Gehringer. 
Just that. No first name needed. Others: Mickey 
Cochrane, Lynwood Rowe. We studied each name as if 
bowed before a fetish. The names apotheosized into 
hitters and pitchers that were immortal. On an open 
space was etched in a clear, hard hand: "1934 How 
Great We Are! Hiram Winkler for Sam and Alvira."

We sat for a time in the presence of the gods, the 
fountain at our backs a bleacher hunkered down around 
the sun-splashed field of emerald green which lay in the 
pit of Tiger stadium.

At length, stirred by the busy tapping of the fountain, 
girl's fingernails upon the counter, I opened the piece of 
paper. Through creases a spidery handwriting appeared:

Dear Boys,
I'm sorry I have kept your ball. Please stop by and 
see me.

Mrs. A. Winkler

We knew there would be no ball-playing until we did. It 
wouldn't be right. We had enough change for one more 
round of orange drinks and thus fortified walked 
uncertainly, joking and punching at first, quietly 
subdued under the grandeur of the totem at last to the 
widow's house. In each of our minds echoed the phrase 
of the rag man, like a last, long call along Kalamazoo 
Avenue, "my sis'r."

We were not in the house long. That is one other 
difference between history and nostalgia. The one 
measures significance by the proportion of power to the 
time. Hitler was powerful because his power lasted so 
long and therefore damaged so many before it ended. 
This we had been told often and believed earnestly. An 
atomic bomb is powerful because it damages so many 
in so short a time. This we had learned recently and 
dared not believe. Both were history. The other, 
nostalgia, measures time as an ironic power in which 
somehow the significance of a very brief moment 
continues to shape and endure in all of time's turning. So 
it was for the few moments in that house.

The retarded sister sat on a rocker in the living room 
by the picture window, a bemused and benign grin 
breaking across the broad expanse of her lower jaw. 
Her hair was set in pin curls and she pulled a white 
handkerchief through her fingers over and over again.
For some reason we saw her before we saw the widow who stood before us at the door. She was so small; the widow. Walking in past her, one was tempted to pat her on the head like a younger sister.

The widow was, and I think I believed this also that first time I saw her closely, rather pretty; not of feature for she was by then getting elderly and elderly people are pretty only to the most perceptive of the young and then often for different reasons—because the elderly are grandparents, say, and therefore beautiful in relation to one's own self-estimation. But the widow was beautiful by a kind of demure if bowed grace, by a serene and tortured heaviness that made the peculiar sudden whimsy of her smile marked as sudden as a crucifix. She was fragile and small, from her tiny hands which floated melodically before her to her bright, small eyes like a young bird's seeking a sign of approval. Her gray hair was brindled with streaks of pale gold and was so light and airy it appeared a kind of vaporous halo about her bowed shoulders.

She offered each of us a Coke in the small green bottle that frosted and beaded in the heat. We drank the Cokes standing up, quickly in two or three gulps, and stood nervously with the empty bottles in our hands. Leonard placed his on a table, noticed it was real wood instead of formica grain, and quickly picked it back up before the moisture left a white spot. The widow took time to talk, for only a moment or so, with each of us. Her knowledge of the neighborhood was vast and specific. "I see Miriam got her braces," she said to me in reference to my younger sister. "And little Johnny walks now," this to Leonard whose baby brother hadn't been walking more than a week. It made us a bit nervous instead of at ease, as if she knew our secret hearts. Gathering our Coke bottles, which she cradled like a bunch of china dolls in her left arm, she waved us into the dining room.

She placed the bottles on a tray and pulled the chain on a small light at a large wooden bureau. Even though the summer sun poured at the small house, the dining room was musty and cool. The light floated over the bureau top as if illuminating a shrine. At the center, as if in a hallowed space, stood a picture of a man in uniform. The portrait was gray and faded. The signature, which we could read clearly as we approached, stood out better than the face which seemed hazed and obscure. The picture had worn spots on it as if someone had for days without end touched fingers to it—worn about the lips and cheeks. The signature read simply: Love Sam.

Next to it was a small frame of medals, faded also now, and on the other side a large team picture of the same 1934 Tigers whose signatures adorned the baseball. Unconsciously I attached the signatures to the faces I knew by heart. There was the great Hank Greenbug, there Schoolboy Rowe, there the monkey face of Black Mike Cochrane. And there, nestled by the portrait, was a baseball, its scrawny hide nicked, one strip of black electrical tape wound tightly around it. I reached out to touch my ball.

"I'll trade," she said quickly. Then added, "Although I don't think you want to play with that one. Here's a dollar for a new ball." She shoved the bill quickly, jerkily, in my shirt pocket before I could refuse it. "I don't think . . . " I started to say.

"Please." And the look in her eye then was beyond denying.

We were about to leave, heading for the door. On impulse I stopped. "He called you sister?" I asked.

"Sister-in-law. He pitched in the minor leagues and was called up for the '34 series. Oh, it was grand. But he didn't play."

"Maybe he should have," I joked, referring to the embarrassing seventh game when the Tigers put nearly every pitcher in their line-up against the great Dizzy Dean. Fueled by the Diz's flawless arm, the Cardinals stacked one run on top of the other until they mercilessly defeated the Tigers 11 to zero.

"Yes," she laughed. "They tried everyone else. Sam and I were there for the game. We kept hoping . . . ."

I tried, terribly, to picture him on the mound; the hunched peanut body, the bulbous head, the apelike arms—these tuned to the major leagues? It was beyond belief.

"He joined the Army with my husband in 1941. They were together for a year. My Sam died in France. Hiram was hit . . . is that the right word?" She looked confused and distant for a moment. "By a mine in Germany."

Not even nostalgia helps me find a proper response for that. We walked silently out the door. The retarded sister had not moved. Suddenly she began rocking fast, faster. The white handkerchief twirled amid her thick fingers like an imprisoned bird. When the words came I was surprised how deep they were, as if coughed up from some mysterious, subterranean force that flowed pent up in the wells of her spirit. "He lived," she said and settled back in the rocker.

"Yes," replied the widow. Then, "yes," so softly the closing door carried her world away.
Up From the Grave, She
Chemically kept, surely suspended
on the uni-dimensional tightrope
between past and future,
untimely torn
from the courts of Law
the hands of the Clock
the grip of Death
by God the Photographer
See how brilliance turns to subtlety
and lines once bold now fade
The vague but sincerely metallic castle
bears her yet very gently
May this rose grace and become
you

—Tom VanMilligen
The Gift

Months ago (or maybe even a couple of years now)
I made up my Christmas list and gave it to God.

"Lord," I said,
"You know how much I wanna serve you.
And I really think I could get down to some
heavy serving if only You'd give me
a man.
An' I'll be patient, Lord,
But when you give him to me, please let him have
an outgoing personality
good taste in clothes
a sense of humor and
nice eyes.

Let him be someone who
has a similar background (for my mother's sake)
believes in Christian education (gotta think of the kids, ya know)
maybe plays the guitar or something
has an up-to-date view on women's roles and
doesn't smoke or drink (much).

Well, Lord, I'll leave the details up to You, but
You know what I'm looking for."

Time's been passing uneventfully
And my life is still like Narnia before the Lion came—
"Always winter but never Christmas"

Yet there must be a Christmas for me somewhere;
The hard part is not being able to
Count the shopping days.

—Anonymous
Explanation
The sun beamed at me today
and creation sparkled.
I stretched out my arms
to embrace the joy
but it wouldn’t fit—
so I hugged you,
my friend.
—Patricia Westerhof
A Living Example of Faith

A True Story

Many people believe that the only reason there is illness in life is due to lack of faith. These same people also believe that the only cure for this illness is faith healing. If you find nothing wrong with this statement, look again. Read it closely. Hopefully, you will realize it's emptiness. If you are ill, according to these people, it is because you have no faith. So tell me how in the world you can be cured by faith if you have none. You simply cannot be a believer and an unbeliever at the same time.

This issue never bothered me until I had to deal with it face to face. I was always impressed when famous "healers" supposedly "healed" the sick; however, I had the opportunity to witness a "live show" instead of watching it on television. I was attending a Jesus Festival for four days. I made it a point to be at the "healing tent" every day. The first day I was impressed with the skill of the healer and the number of people healed. However, the days that followed revealed unbelievable things. We were all told to raise our hands toward Heaven and speak in tongues. At this point, I became suspicious. I had been taught that speaking in tongues was useless unless someone could interpret. How could one man interpret when ten thousand people were all babbling different things at the same time? Furthermore, since when was "Bla-bla-bla" a foreign language? I could not help but ask myself who was wrong and who was not. Was I sacrilegious by being seemingly the only one not speaking in tongues or was everyone else out of order? The answer came quickly since I was slightly outnumbered. As a result, I began following the crowd by mumbling any sound I thought would fit in.

The healer was finally convinced that the Holy Spirit was now with Him. He began pulling people out of the crowd according to what was being revealed to him. For example, he claimed there was a woman with a black shirt who needed to be healed of a kidney disease. After a few minutes of suspense, an extremely emotional woman in black came to the front begging to be healed. The healer asked her if she believed God could heal her, and the instant she said yes, he "slayed" her—an act healers use by placing their hands on the sick person and "pushing" the person over, claiming it was the power of the Holy Spirit "slaying" him. I was tempted to go up there with a false illness and if he pushed me over, I wanted to tell him not to.

Many other questions came to my mind. Why did some of the same people go up there every day? Where was their faith? If the Spirit was telling the healer who to heal, why would He pick the same people if they were supposed to be healed already? Does God forget from day to day who He has healed and who He has not? Does the healer? Does God only heal when you speak in tongues first? What if you don't know how? Furthermore, if God was displeased with this whole act, why didn't He put an end to it?

The whole festival was filled with tense emotions and I convinced myself that this was what healers used to "drag" people to them. Emotions make human beings vulnerable and healers know it!

I was glad to return to my home church. I never appreciated it so much until I realized what orderly worship was. I was glad our church had more respect and reverence for God and His House. Furthermore, I was glad we were not so charismatic. I never liked it when people tried to "shove" their beliefs on me. I thought most members of our church felt this way also. However, I was wrong.

My father has suffered from multiple sclerosis since 1947. He has been confined to a wheelchair since 1956. He is also legally blind. He is now fifty-three years old. I have never seen him standing. As much as I would like believe differently, I know he would be no different than he is now. He has not let his handicap stand in the way of his life. Even though he gets discouraged at times, he never gives up. He saved my older sister once from drowning in our pool by falling out of his wheelchair into the pool, with nothing on to keep HIM from drowning. And they are both alive to this day! He caught a huge, beautiful sailfish—with no help—sitting right in his chair. He has attended church faithfully all these years, pulled weeds, done paper work, telephoned for car and household repairs, etc.... He even managed to get stuck in the grass, fall out of his wheelchair and take my mom out for dinner in the same day! Now is that an example of energy or what?!

My mother is another strong person. She married my dad only one year before he got M.S. As a nurse, she knew that physically, the disease only made a patient worse. She could have left right then and there, but she didn't. She stayed with him and helped him. As the years went by, she began living two lives, her's and her husband's. He had to be dressed and undressed, put in bed and taken out of it, put into the car and taken out,
and helped with many other things. You would think that with such complications, two people wouldn't want to add more to their lives. Wrong. They adopted three girls and I am in the middle. As I grew older, I discovered God had put something special together in our home.

One evening, two people from our church came to our door. They came to speak to my dad. My mom was not home. I had been in another room while they were talking but was later called in along with my younger sister, Teri, to pray with them. We all held hands and Mr. Jones prayed that my dad would walk “tomorrow” and then he thanked God for answering our prayer. Here was my first question. Dad was NOT walking, so how could Mr. Jones thank God for answering the prayer when it had NOT been answered? This did not seem right.

The next day arrived and he did not walk. The only thing Teri and I could say was, “Hey God, what happened?”

After that evening, every time either of them saw my mom, my sister, or me, they would pull us aside and try to get us to attend their meetings. They acted so strangely, we all felt like criminals being bribed into a robbery. My mother got disgusted with the whole act. She told us that if God wanted my dad to walk, He would have done it a long time ago.

Even though I believed what my mom said, I was still on the “other” side. I wanted my dad to walk, and I was excited that someone thought he would. I was emotionally high. I was also angry with my mother because she did not believe it and was trying to get me to feel the same way. I felt like a yo-yo being pulled from side to side. It seemed like she was blowing the excitement. Little did I know that she was trying to save me from great disappointment and hurt.

When Mr. Jones and his friend realized my mom was out of the picture, they began to work on me and Teri. They would haul us aside and say things like, “You believe don’t you?” and “Keep praying!” They told us of their visions and gave us Bible verses like Hebrews 13:8 which says “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (RSV). When we read this, we wondered why they didn’t see verse nine which says not to be led astray by strange and diverse things. I had never seen two people work on a family so much in my life. It was like they were out to get us.

For a while, it seemed like they DID get to us; or at least part of us. Many times they would say to my dad, “You believe it can happen don’t you?” It seemed as if they had to keep checking up on him to make sure he had enough faith, or he would not walk. He always answered them positively; he really did believe in miracles, but he was willing to accept the fact that God had answered his prayers with “No.” Instead of sitting there all his life feeling sorry for himself, he used his life as a living example of faith. This may sound funny, but it seemed that Mr. Jones and his friend were more burdened with my dad’s handicap than he was. It appeared that they wanted him to walk so badly, they would take the credit for it. I got the impression that if he did not walk, they would not be able to handle it. They seemed so insecure. When they prayed, they didn’t ASK God for healing, they almost DEMANDED it of Him. This is when I realized that God was not behind this “activity.” If He was, then why was our family splitting apart? We were united before, so why would my dad’s healing separate us? If God was in this, He would make it a joyful, unified experience; not a fighting, dividing one.

I heard a speaker, Dr. James Dobson, say that God gives minds and common sense for a reason. He does not expect us to live with the attitude of, “If God doesn’t tell me to do something, I don’t have to do anything.” Rather, He gives us minds and common sense to use wisely. There are times when physical illness and surgery are in order and God uses both as instruments to make us grow in Him. As a family, we still believe God could heal my dad, but we are not waiting around until He answers our prayers with “Yes.” We learned a lot from this experience. I don’t care if people say my dad is not walking because of a lack of faith. I know he has faith, and as far as I am concerned, he is a prime example of it! I am sure God is pleased with him. I just feel sorry for people who waste their lives waiting for God to GIVE them their way. The smile on my dad’s face will outdo their impatient frowns any day. Furthermore, if anyone needs healing, it is people with impatient attitudes! Even though faith healers get publicity, it is people with attitudes like my father’s who are the REAL miracles!
Religion 108/Academic Confines

Sun's brief encounter
Bold against
Rain-dressed bark
Of needled pine
Took my eyes to see
Through windowed glass
That which I could not
Touch.

—Kimberly Wyngarden
Silence

I. A stone stands one hundred years
In memory of a man who did not live as long
While thousands die unmourned.
I would prefer to be forgotten, than
In front of passive crowds to smile,
Singing songs about vague painted rainbows
While a silence in the street
Recalls that hope must be elusive, or
With unfocused eyes to live,
Struggling to claim my right
While on a cross One hangs
Forsaken and ashamed, because
All has been accomplished and now
With road too wide and view too narrow, and
Light dimmed by desire not to see
The victory is denied.

II. A tree still stands against a darkening sky
But one who was there moves on.
The work is accomplished—
A victory, so to speak, and yet
There is silence that utters pain
And coldness (an attempt to hide it):
Distance unbridged, walls unbroken—
A question of consequence avoided, although
It must persist until one day
In thunder, fire, split-second fear
The question is answered
Conclusively. And then
Focusing finally outward
We shall see Him (the One forsaken)
Face to face; and in silence, know.

—Lori Kort
Jack's heels clicked rhythmically on the speckled stone tiles of West Hall. Plastered arches wobbled over his head, one by one, until he could see the end of the hall resolve into dim focus. He felt a cold sweat tingling over his brow. Embroiled in an inward battle against a crippling nervousness, he tried once again to convince himself that this was all just another step in the long process of arduous study. But his knees trembled. No, this would not do. Jack stopped at the last arch and put his hand to the oak trim. The varnish felt cool and slippery beneath his moist fingertips. Within him his bowels twisted and spat. Wasn't this hall familiar to him? How many days had he strode confident and book-ladened beneath its arches? And the cross—how often had the sight of it inspired his studies?

Jack's eyes lifted to the life-sized wooden cross fastened to the end of the hall. Today it looked more lofty, broader, but it also appeared heavier as it brooded over the shadows. In the diffused light passing through the frosted glass of the Room of Examinations and Dissertations, the solid spans of the cross seemed to strain at their anchors, ready to topple on Jack if he approached. Keeping his eyes on its crux, he shuffled slowly towards the door. But a thousand muted voices began chanting in his mind. A million faces, pictures, and printed pages threatened to shatter the bulging closets of his memory. Jack uttered a silent prayer, so quick, so self-encompassing, that what passed was like a lightning bolt of his essence. As he fumbled for the doorknob on his left, he felt a becalming amusement that he would have ever tried to contain such lightning bolts with words.

The heavy door swung open noiselessly on its oiled hinges. There before him stood a semi-circle of tall desks silhouetted against the bank of clear windows at the far end of the room. Jack could see that each desk housed a leather upholstered chair. But one such chair stood deskless in the center of the configuration, close to the window. The autumn sun streamed warmly through the glass onto the back and seat of the chair. Jack took a deep breath and looked at the clock high on the right wall. 8:45. They would be arriving soon. He walked quickly around the desks and took his seat.

In the chair, Jack was surprised at the comforting heat it radiated into his lower back and thighs. The sunlight stroked the nape of his cleanly cropped neck. Its warmth soothed him. He secretly hoped that the examiners would allow the drapes to remain open. Leaning back into the padding of his seat, Jack began to review the sparse furnishings of the room. The curve of the desk-tops sloped steeply down away from him. He realized that only the heads of his examiners would be visible to him. Their bodies would be hidden behind massive oak panels, flecked and orange with age. Shuffling the legs of his chair, Jack faced the mouth of the semi-circle squarely. The top of the door rose in a rectangular outline above the desk directly before him. The door seemed to be seated at the desk.

Along the white walls on either side hung a row of picture frames level with the clock. Within each frame reposed the holy faces of church fathers, like an encircling gallery of dignitaries. Jack studied each carefully as if he were desperately cramming some church history. Each portrait hung there for the subject's significant contribution to the foundations of the church Jack loved. Each visage bore a sacred, sober stare as if they were frozen in thought—a grand, heavenly thought.

To his left hung six painted originals of the early fathers. Almost immediately above him hovered the surreal face of St. Augustine. A glow enveloped the saint's head like a divine mist as his enraptured eyes searched upward for the source of that hallowed light. Jack began to wonder about what kind of question Augustine would ask if he were one of the examiners: perhaps, "How does the sunlight on your back compare with the glory and the comfort of the light of Christ?" Jack could not help but feel that Augustine's face was slowly rising upward in the painting, as though drawn irresistibly towards the God of Light, even in this artist's representation.
Gloam, founder of the seminary and pillar of the denomination. It was his influential christology and anthropology which gave the North American Reformed Church of Christ its distinct credibility among the orthodox churches. The theologian’s eyes pierced the glass to meet Jack’s gaze. “What is the nature, composition, and office of man, and how have these been affected by Adam’s sin?” Jack began to organize his thoughts, as though preparing to answer. He immediately felt some regret that he had rebelled against Gloam’s works and had not studied them as carefully as he should. The doctor’s grey face seemed to accuse Jack’s stumbling thoughts.

Suddenly, voices and footsteps echoed in the hall. Jack could hear the squeak of leather and the jingle of keys. The voices were hushed at first but grew more clear and confident as they drew nearer. “This door here?” asked the nearest voice. “No, that’s the student lounge. The door directly across the hall,” came a distant voice of authority. Jack got up from his chair stiffly. He felt a chill that demanded he resume his seat. But the committee began to file in before him. They seemed at first to take no notice of him as they hung their grey overcoats on wooden hangers in the corner. They went directly to the desks and pulled out the chairs to sit down. Finally the man who placed a folder upon the center desk looked to Jack with a business-like smile. Jack noticed the expensive cut of his black suit and the crisp white of the shirt beneath his dark tie.

“Ah, Jack. I’d like you to meet the committee members who will be your interviewers for today.” He made a quick gesture to a large, bald man in grey pinstripes. “This is Doctor Kenneth Small. To his left is Doctor Arthur Straights. And the man to my left is Mr. Stanley, who, incidently, has travelled all the way from Cider Springs. Of course we have met briefly before, but in case you have forgotten, I am Doctor Alfred Walboard, and I will be chairing today’s examination.” Jack shook each man’s hand as they were announced, then took his seat with a bit of trembling in his fingers. From his seat he surveyed the committee’s faces with a forced smile.

I remind you, Jack, to remain relaxed and calm. This is not, after all, the Final Judgment.

Jack joined the others as they began to say the prayer in a mumbling unison. But his mind was a turmoil of thoughts and anxieties. The sunlight now glanced off his left cheek and coloured the closed lid of one eye in splashes of reds and purples. He remembered his wife whom he’d left in bed and how she had watched him pull on his best dress slacks and sweater. Before he had shut the bedroom door she had told him she would be praying for him and then had turned her face into the pillow as if to begin. With the “amen,” Jack slowly opened his eyes. Spots danced like fairy fairies before one of them.

“I remind you, Jack, to remain relaxed and calm. This is not, after all, the Final Judgment. We must simply give an account for the seminary’s work before you can be allowed to join the ministry in ordination.” The chairman took his seat and began to shuffle papers. The student could not see the papers Walboard held, but he could hear the methodical rustle and crackle as they were reviewed. Jack could imagine the kind of materials each member had—xeroxed copies of transcripts, psychological analyses, personal inventories, remarks from his past instructors, and letters of recommendation from consistory—all reviewed, shuffled and ordered to produce a mosaic of Jack Holmstead’s essence. “Doctor Small, I believe we will begin with your question. Once again I remind everyone to relax and allow this proceeding to become a joyous expression of our Christian faith. Doctor Small ...” Jack tensed. One more admonition to relax and he would be instantly transformed into a rigid mannequin.

The big man swept the side of his bald head with the palm of his hand, as though brushing down an imaginary clump of unruly hair. Pursing his thin lips, he trained his steel eyes on Jack’s paling face. Jack bit the inside of his lips, and anxieties. The sunlight now glanced off his left cheek and coloured the closed lid of one eye in splashes of reds and purples. He remembered his wife whom he’d left in bed and how she had watched him pull on his best dress slacks and sweater. Before he had shut the bedroom door she had told him she would be praying for him and then had turned her face into the pillow as if to begin. With the “amen,” Jack slowly opened his eyes. Spots danced like fairy fairies before one of them.

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For a brief moment, Jack's mind seemed inexplicably empty, as empty and as stark as the simple cross out in the hall. He squirmed nervously, but then he found that the inner mechanism of his brain began to formulate a structure for response. He folded his bonde brows and began. Although a little hesitant at first, Jack struggled to keep his sentences complete and clear. Soon the words were rolling from his tongue easily. The examiners did not fix their eyes on him, but only looked up occasionally to nod approval. Jack, however, kept his focus on them continually. He began to feel as though he were speaking to the tops of their skulls, massaging their hairy or hairless domes with his words. When they looked up to nod, it was as if they were begging him to continue giving them this pleasure.

Jack knew he was answering the question well. He was growing more comfortable now as he spoke. This was familiar territory and his reply took on some of the characteristics of a poetic recital. The descriptions he gave reflected the structure and symmetry of the theological enterprise. He kept his statements logically ordered and balanced. He had to fight a strange urge to rhyme the ends of his sentences, or to join his words in purposed consonance and assonance.

But what disturbed him was the fact that he was growing more and more detached from his utterances. Though he performed very well mechanically, even to the point of citing and reciting the proper Scriptural references, other thoughts were invading his self-awareness. It was while he was speaking of Christ's state of humiliation that a vivid memory flashed across his mind. For an instant, the flabby, corpusculed face of Colonel Johnston lolled before him. Spittle leaked uncontrollably from the corners of the old man's mouth. The cataracted and yellow eyes rocked deeply in their wrinkled sockets. Half-paralyzed lips fluttered and flopped as the man attempted once again to tell Jack of terror and heroism in the villages of western Europe. Jack was on the verge of pausing in his speech when the image was wheeled off in the sterile, white flash of a nursing uniform.

As he continued, Jack realized that every word, every idea he expressed conjured up some surreal or graphic phantasm that did not quite fit the words he spoke but begged for its own utterance. He was now giving an account of the dual nature of Christ which he hoped to tie into the significance of the Incarnation. But when he spoke of flesh, his mind was pushing a cart down the isle of a supermarket. It stopped at a meat cooler and he saw his own hand grasp a package of fresh roast. The red juices dripped over the edge of the styrofoam. When he spoke of man, his universal conception was violently displaced by the detailed countenance of St. Augustine. The painted strokes were animate now, with blinking, watery eyes and a whispering mouth, which Jack could not hear for the hum of his own voice. When Jack went on to explicate the divine, a flowing mist enshrouded the Saint's head. But now his mind's eye searched in the direction of Augustine's stare until it was stabbed by a dazzling white light.

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In a jerking reflex, Jack twisted his head to clear his eyes of the glare pouring through the window. Though his speech did not falter, the description of the Incarnation he gave could not possibly have indicated to his examiners the visions he experienced. The meat, the face of Augustine, and the terrifically bright light spiraled to merge in an absurd implosion until all melted into the limp form of little Kathleen Pearson. She was encased in a glass box with yellow lamps showcasing her frail condition. Cotton patches were taped over her eyes and an intravenous tube lanced her weakly pulsing scalp. While she had lain there so still, so serene before death, he had prayed with her despairing parents behind the smudged viewing glass.

With a shudder, Jack finished up his reply. The committee seemed pleased with his answer. He had performed well and had given a flawless account of his studies. Even Gloam's inspecting eyes seemed less harsh. This encouraged Jack. Even though the following questions were more narrow and intricate, he felt more relaxed. He did not try to fight the appearance of the strange images now, but he did not allow them to interfere with his answers. He remained systematic, logical, rationally flawless in his theological expositions. He touched all the orthodox bases. Not once did he give any outward clue to the flood of senseless apparitions that tossed in his mind.

Finally it was Mr. Muller's turn to pose a question. He was a layman appointed to the committee by Synod ever since the great hermeneutical debates had marred the trust of the church constituency. He was a farmer, with the admiration of his home community. He wrote many letters to the church publications. He stood for grass-roots conservatism and possessed the education and influence to express it. There was a drawl in his voice that betrayed his inescapable fetter to a more isolated existence.

"Yuh know, Mr. Holmstead, that there has been quite a stir in recent years over text interpretation. How we read the Bible will surely affect the things we believe. Now I believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God." His voice was increasing in volume. "That belief is precious to the church in the face of the devil's lies that try to make us think that it's just another book of nice stories and poems. I'm sure you'll run into this kind of thing both in the church and out. My question may seem a little strange but allow me to ask it since I believe it can show us all very clearly how you read the Bible. If you were to have a camera and were to take a picture of the Garden of Eden as we find it in Genesis two and three, what would that picture show? Please gimme and the other fellows here an idea of what we'd see on the picture."

Jack had expected some inquiry along these lines. It was a big issue in the church. He had prepared himself for questions concerning higher criticism, biblical history, and the relationship of symbolism in Scripture to cultural understanding. The fact was that Jack was quite willing to accept a flesh and blood Adam but he also was aware of the conflicts that arise from holding a strictly literal interpretation. But this question. He recalled the jokes he and his friends had made about such questions and the zealous people who asked them. They had ways of making you talk in the Cider Springs Inquisition. Jack tried to keep the smirk off his face. He looked apologetically at Mr. Muller.

"I'm afraid I'm not much of a photographer. The picture would probably be overexposed and blurred." There was a faint chuckle that bobbed all the heads behind the desks.

"Let's assume you had one of those
Adam reposed in what appeared to be a
massive oak, lay the naked form of
Adam reposed in what appeared to be a
to detect the return of impressions. He tried desperately to
solve them on a single frozen plane, but he truly was a poor photographer.
He had never taken such questions seriously enough to consider how he would answer. The events and descriptions of
Genesis began to unfold in his mind. But as he opened his mouth to speak, he realized that no longer was there any
mechanical process to activate his expressions. His words were coming as
verbal incarnations of a swirling jumble of impressions. He tried desperately to
resolve them on a single frozen plane, but he truly was a poor photographer.
Jack could barely hear Muller now. He
realized the inevitability of giving some kind of answer to the farmer’s question. His pleading looks to the rest of the board were met with indifference. He had
ever taken such questions seriously enough to consider how he would answer. The events and descriptions of
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resolve them on a single frozen plane, but he truly was a poor photographer.
The best he could do was begin at one corner of his imagination with reverse
strokes of a mental paint brush. The image was there, moving, living, bright.
His voice began to lift the images off the canvas and recreate them for the
benefit of Muller. He was aware that he had closed his eyes as an aid to his attempt. He felt like a child recalling
some Sunday school story for the
stooping ears of parents.
The sun beamed down through the
vegetation of Eden like a golden cascade of Heaven’s glory. The
emerald lush of giant trees was splashed with the brilliant hues of birds, insects and blossoms. Life was pulsing,
bursting from every twig, every blade of grass, every song of tiny, fluttering beast. There before a crimson-berried bush lay
a great tan and gold lion, breathing in the
glinted air in shallow, rapid breaths.
To one huge paw was curled around the
haunches of a silver-fleeced lamb. The
man’s face was twisted, as if wrestling
with the logic of his inquiry and the
colourful outburst that answered it. The
potential candidate stepped out of the
Room for Examinations and Dissertations with a deliberate, sure
step. He paused in the hallway before the empty cross. From the student lounge he felt the pull to go in and try to recapture the vision of a moment ago.
But the muffled voices from the examination room prodded him to reconsider his performance— how he stacked up theologically before the
core of the church’s intelligentsia. “It’s finished,” he thought to himself. “I need to rest. Whatever I’ve done or said is in
God’s hands now.” With a sigh of relief he turned to the door of the student lounge.

Eve was strolling slowly around another tree, some yards of timothy

farther distant. Her hair was pushed back over
her slender shoulders and rolled like a
darkly curled waterfall over her tanned
back. She stepped gracefully around the
foot of that tree. In one hand she held a
chirping sparrow which seemed to be
offering its song to her. It bobbed its tiny
head and shuffling its little feet in her
palm. She filled Jack’s thoughts with a
tremendous feeling of nobility, humility, and sensuality. Her breasts were like the beautifully curved thrusts of royal
towers. The lithe muscle of her legs
carried her more evenly and splendidly
than any guided carriage.
She ducked gently beneath a low branch of the tree. Purple fruits dappled
the ends of the limb. They hung heavy and round from sinuous stems that
snarled in brown coils to join the rough,
grey trunk. A single, green strand waved
around the low limb. It glittered as
though inlaid with thousands of tiny
gems. One end dropped from the
branch to stroke the purple fruits. The
other end thickened to a wise-looking
head, scaled in indigo pearl and set with
two glittering ruby eyes. A split, black
tongue shot out through crystal fangs
toward the innocent figure of Eve, as
though the serpent were splitting some
lewd, but silent obscenity at the queen of
paradise.
Suddenly, the entire image shrunk to a
small point on a vast blue and green
sphere, sheathed in a misty glow. An
explosion of new-born stars burst in a
billion-part harmony of praise. The
crescendo emanated in brilliant gleams of light that bathed the globe and
echoed to the very edges of the universe. Then the image dissolved in a
shimmering flash of white and disappeared.

Jack got up slowly from his seat to
shake hands with the committee. Each
gave him a weak salutation over a
limp hand. Jack’s own hands were
steady, even when he shook the
powerful hand of farmer Muller. The
man’s face was twisted, as if wrestling
with the logic of his inquiry and the
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Flamingos (Woodcut print)
Friendship's Wall

Enmeshed by invisible barbed wire;
Having made it past the mine field
I thought to scale the wall;
the old wall was high.
Now it seems the wall will never stop.
You're always laying bricks one row
above my fingertips.
You stopped laying bricks far, far, above me.
And now you've added
A new dimension to the word
Agony.

Fingers raw and bleeding,
Muscles weary—screaming in silent pain.
Elbows scraped, jeans torn, callouses and
Blisters ripped and ugly.
Now you've added glass and the
Sharp edges cut and slash;
first barbed wire, then
I step around what glass I can—
And look at the final barrier
that was invisible from below.
I must try—my bones ache.
I want to let go
and fall;
At least then I wouldn't
Hurt.

But I cannot. Every principle within
Balks at falling. I MUST climb the fence.
I want to climb it because
I know the person building the wall.
I cannot be stopped by
Barbed wire.
I've been wracked up in it
so often;
Now I'm so numb from moving
I'd be surprised if I
Felt at all.
Now the things I wonder since I
know I will not fall;
How do I get down the other side?
What waits for me there?

—Emily Yost
Wonder

Gentle Lord Jesus how do I tell them?
How do I let them know who you really are?
I can only tell them what you have done for me,
How you moved me deep inside.
You changed more than just my words—
More than just my habits and my Sunday mornings.
You came into the depths of my being
And began to fertilize the dormant seed.
You packed fresh soil around my exposed roots
And sturdied my weak, slender stem.
You sheltered me from the winds and storms until I
grew straight and tall.
But then one day you began snapping off the old, dried up portions.
I cried out in pain and amazement.
“What are you doing, my Lord?”
But you gently touched my lips with Your finger
And as I grew quiet I heard Your own weeping.
I saw Your fresh tears and I wondered.
Oh my heart aches with the wonder of that moment
When I realized You were weeping with me.
You did not come to plant a seed and leave it to its own.
You came to be its life.

—Jill Wilson
A Song of Descents
imagine...
such
color rhythms
biceps rippling
causing
worshipful
awe
in
all.
but
one
step
down
color fades
gray
where
muscle notes
wither
grasping
deeper
to...
some
say
self.
—Lambert VanPoolen

Robert J. Plank