

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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HOPE OF SLEEP

At first I feel my arms
go off to rest.
They loop off the bed's end
and crawl away, loud
with relief. The legs
go next
and always hunt in pairs.

Only the brain
is left, tiny
in the vast bed.

Outside, the elms lean
into clumps, gossiping
of violence.
Somewhere blood leaks out
from its shocked skin.

Now there's no hope of sleep.
Under the sheets
my absent body tingles
like an amputated toe.

Larry S. Chengges

TWO POEMS

Our Lady of Bedlam

She is the center of the stage,
Eve wrapped in pale leaves,
stained with cherries,
Madame du Barry, I dare presume,
Ligeia, Lady Anne or Sylvia,
gathering bouquets
of mercury stems
for an invisible audience,
delicate as a morning lily,
her mouth opening,
a fresh flower,
yes, a full rose
wet with icy dew,
soundless in its blood
echo, like an old shell
I used to fondle
when first learning
the lies of cold speech,
wider, much wider,
in a velvet chasm
of night, beckoning seeds,
but the thorns,
but the sperms,
the flames in her dry throat
bite all her songs
into cauliflower shreds,
hanging them
from the hooks
of her empty mouth
like dead faggots.

Slips of sail
in wine-dark bowels,
 I would mount
 her and wake
to Sappho's rocky isle
 as she pirouettes
 and sinks in unseen pools,
crumbling like a hacked
 weed under me,
 roots up-ended
in the sun-blasted sky,
dirt-clogged and wrecked,
 she lays under me,
and I bring black
soil for her wound,
 to bury her,
 to bury her
in a corner jar,
 out of sight,
but the ocean has roared,
risen from her drooling
 thighs, yellow
 as the moon scream,
and we drown together,
 are taken down
 to where the rose's
burning lips and her
lily heart are wrapped
 in coral shrouds.

By Land and Sea

Fleshed-in with squarish, bird-grimed stones,
a man-made parody of a man's blunt finger is
jammed deep down into the sea's foamy vulva

as I casually, then cautiously move onto a final
flat rock where the abandoned iron tower stands
its lonely guard and could, at last, begin

to lose the gray blanket of my flesh in the fog,
becoming a petrified star tossed in an artificial
tidal pool, then a squawking mother gull dropping

baby oysters against the mountainous fangs
until they crack and their own pallid fetuses
dribble out in broken yolks like broken moons.

I am a rock among rocks, tumbling in the ceaseless
breakers, in winds of water, but I have already
learned the rock-rooted value of a stoic

drunkenness and let myself flow in time's flow
until a sudden lull allows me to scurry away,
to seek out the selfless cellar of a stone,

though I must protest, and do, a proud armored
fist shaken in excited defiance. Someday, if human
hands do not rip me untimely from my second womb,

I will grow huge, survive to swim back to the sea,
a monster among monsters, slashing at the awesome
knowledge of some deeper, darker destiny.

The sun burns through the mist and lays a thick
golden carpet across the massive, moss-green waves
for me, especially for me, my airy feet,

and I will myself to walk into the rolling heart
of a distant blizzard, captured by its antique
world of sculptured ivory maidens flinging their
cameo forms into the earth's vast cauldron,
light as lint, frail as moths, white as gulls,
diving, unseen, into that miracle of breasts.

Sky, sea, the dawn's harsh reef, suddenly all
reek of sour eternity, the tyranny of mortal scales
and brittle shells, blood-warm toes gasping for gills.

In all the years since time began to count,
which I cannot really count, hordes of human
organisms flourished, faded like matches in the night.

Nameless, faceless, evaporated souls, they drift
into me across the sea's dying breath like
tattered infant ghosts, whispers of sails.

As the snails cling to the still rocks below,
so they cling to me, these barnacles of my mind,
each time I think of walking water to the sun.

Edward Butscher

HOMAGE TO POINT REYES

*to Cliff and Effie, who discovered
this land and brought us here*

down
down through shafts of sunlight
plunging wings tucked
skimming the treetops
diving toward
the valley floor

pebbles swell
into cows

the upcoming fields
spread

this trim bird the sparrow hawk
sacred to ancient peoples
not only has he worsted
the hostile darkness
he renews himself daily

the bottomland
aglow
the village
aglow in fog
the post office
in a golden light

this is my home this peninsula
here on the ridge my bed
my mate
I am withdrawn
I say nothing throughout the meal

a glass of water from the tap

this

this peninsula, gentlemen,
once an island
seems another world
in space and time lying
on the San Andreas Fault
it has moved northward
up the coast from Mexico
since Paleocene times hundreds
hundreds of miles

the fault is

a fault is an enormous fracture
The San Andreas Fault is visible
for seven hundred miles Professor Friskie
has discovered a rift
that runs one and one half times
around the globe mostly under the seas
deep incredibly deep it
responsible for the drift of continents
and of continents this fault

most find this

a goodly countrie
with fruitful soyle
stored with many blessings
for the use of man

the sparrow hawk

alights in the pine
a miniature falcon
fierce yet strangely sweet
he has worsted the hostile darkness
it's all right now

I am pulling loose
 night is over
 the fog burning off

cows thick
 on the valley floor

it's milking time
 a boy gallops
 bareback out of the barn
 plunging headlong
 down through alfalfa
 the rushing stalks

I am coming apart

in 1579 Francis Drake
 medium build Christian skin white
 armd and considerd dangerous
 saild up this coast
 pillaging towns and looting ships he
 sought a Baye faire and good
 in which to repair his vessel this
 Pirate was wary of the Indians
 watching him from the cliff he
 orderd his band to erect
 a fortress of stone however
 and subsequently
 the Indians enterd the fort
 with gifts with feathers and beads the
 chief gave Drake a jerkin
 of soft leather the English
 were amazed these Indians
 were the Coast Miwok Indians
 of the California coast
 who lived without a Pattern of Warfare

in Harmonie with the surrounding nations
and owning with them the land
in common in the stone edifice they
sang songs and danced physically
powerful men the Indians the English
were awed by their ability
to run long distances at high speeds
and to spear fish with great accuracy
The ship physician observed that as they
broyled these Fish over the Flame
they took good heed that they
bee not burnt the women
wore a skirt of bulrushes
covering that which nature
teaches should be hidden
smiling the chief settled
a crown of feathers and shells
upon the head of Francis Drake this
act was interpreted
by Drake as yielding up
the right and title
of the land to him

sunlight pours into the valley
as from a pitcher spout
a flock of doves
wheels round the pine
the settled doves bob violently
as the newcomer alights
and makes the branchtip
thrash

it was
some years back
an October day

a young man and woman
 newcomers to town on foot
 the lame dog
 her pet since childhood
 did not go the distance
 was too great he she
 their arms laden with groceries
 returnd along the estuary
 among blackberry bushes heavily bearing
 the amazing flowers swayd
 shoulderhigh and tingled
 with the musick of the harpsicord
 they passt a man out there who

after the meal
 I go to the other room
 and shut the door
 I lie face down
 I am trying to crawl
 out of my body

the pain the bewilderment
 I need a doctor

In 1595
 hardbitten Captain Cermeño crew
 near mutiny wreckd and
 abandoning his oriental cargo
 the sailors close to starvation
 ate the dog would have
 eaten each other had not a
 thereafter the Indians
 these were the Coast Miwok Indians
 who lived without pattern
 thereafter slept on silk
 and ate their acorn meal
 from Ming porcelain

Point Reyes

Point of the Kings

so named by S. Vizcaino who
 white Christian heavy build
 sighted who in 1603
 sighted this point on the day
 of the three kings of the nativity

this discourse gentlemen
 recedes quickly into the past
 return it to the shelf
 among the outdated manuals
 for steam locomotives
 surveying
 the repair of electric cars

despite the wildflowers
 singing along the estuary that day
 the youth was disappointed
 there had been no mail

Mexico, sir, began colonizing California
 in 1767 the priests founded
 missions throughout the
 and Father Peseta converted
 one hundred and fifty-seven
 Coast Miwok Indians in
 later virtually all the
 unfortunately the Mission System
 was a complete failure save
 in the accumulation of Wealth when
 the missions closed
 a few Miwoks returned to
 but most were rounded up by ranchers
 for slave labor those
 who did not die of starvation
 died of disease

in the old photo
he stands pepper-eyed and keen
firelock crookt in his elbow this
is Zack Taylor
old "Rough and Ready" himself
recently acclaimd
for pacifying the Seminoles
and the bloodthirsty Black Hawks
to him personally
did the savage chief
Black Sparrow Hawk surrender
within a month Taylor
led the U.S. Marines into Mexico
to take Texas and California
for the United States

in 48 rolling on axles
into the West
free money!
it's just laying there
all you can take, man
all you can take

we was a rough bunch of boys
up in the Mother Lode
you *hadta* be armed, believe me
on Sundays these shows
over in Whiskeytown bulldogs
sicking a chained bear

the craze for gold
the grizzled miner
the grim miner who killd his comrade
he had to!
the thirstcrazed miner
crawling on hands and knees
kickd in the face!

Sundays bunch of the fellas
usta take their rifles
go out huntin' Indians
for sport

I am trying to leave
the post office
of Final Defeat, U.S.A.

in the pine
an eagle
big as a man! alive!
he grips with his talons
he looks straight *this way*
eyes fierce
like burning out of a magazine plate
or a dollar bill
only not *just pretend*
real!
on the branch!
right now!

the deeds of this valley
go back to the original Mexican grants
one James Berry, in recognition of service
as Colonel in the Mexican Army
then Snook a sea captain
traded with Osio
who sold to Doctor Andrew Randall a
heavy soul heavy investor
keenly interested in real estate
acquired all of Point Reyes but
the banking panic of 55
business depression
depletion of gold
Hetherington, Randall's creditor
appears in the old photograph

as a bewhiskered man
of challenging eye
he engaged in a gun fight
over the possession of a piece of property
later Hetherington
accosted Randall in the lobby
of the Christian Arms Hotel
both drew the Doctor fell heavily
to the oriental rug
a bullet had entered his brain
Hetherington himself
was hangd within a month

trying
trying to leave
the postoffice box where
I am desperate
 for letters of acceptance
 of admiration contracts
 checks, invitations to speak
trying to crawl out of Box 73
out of my education
out of my twenties

doctors know
the two colors that say it all
are silver and black

subsequent purchasers
were the Schafter brothers
San Francisco lawyers who
leased land to ranchers
soon the whole area was devoted
to dairying
Schafter Schafter Schafter
subdivided the holdings into nine ranches

sold to parceled off
then a prominent businessman
sold off subdivided

today the real estate office
stands at the crossroads
here one may find
the old deeds

so much care to raising a son
to feed him clothe him
have his teeth straightened
develop his self-reliance
teach him Donne and Hume
so much effort and expense
to reach this impression
that nothing
that nothing
matters

I am trying to crawl
out of my name

in the cocoon
the caterpillar *decomposes*
he is but goo and slime
unfit for friendship
unfit for love

they passt a man out there
surveying the land
hello 'lo
in boots lumberman's jacket
Surveyor squints into Transit
Assistant faraway responds
to Handsignals these men
are here to survey parts

of Old Mexico they
are measuring territory once
held in common by the Miwoks
and the neighboring Indian nations
today, gentlemen, these shrinking fields
are fields of sorrow and love

in the earthquake of 1906
this lovely hotel was thrown
into the bay see the pictures upstairs
Francis Drake John Schafter
here's a scene from 1910
an outing Anne
in lace puffy sleeves
she leans at the rail
listening to Skipper Jack
and his discourse on Point Reyes
with pipe stem he points
to a hawk working the shore
this present instrument
is the transcript of what he said
nearby is Anne's brother Stephen
soft leather jacket
trousers flared at the cuff
he reads from a little book
that I will write one day

a ribbon marks the page

dust on the road
Constable Can-do
slung with desperate weaponry
motors forth
in his electric car
he is the scourge of rumrunners
dopesters and others

with no place
in this disquisition
youth is no match for
known to reach speeds
upwards of 18 miles per hour
he we
dauntless with his megaphone
and string

this restlessness
as of branchtips thrashing

Point Reyes population 350
sea level 30 today
a village divided

here live the settled Catholic families
a hardworking group
acquiring acquiring
tools antlers homes
they drive the pickup trucks
rifles slung inside and
patriotic stickers on the bumpah
many are wealthy
control the local boards
these good people active in trade
chief occupation— ranching

here too the newcomers their dress
harks back nonetheless to the days
of the early settlers
hair of Ben Franklin headbands
of Black Sparrow Hawk
no religion as such
they drive wrecks bright
with the bird and flower
active in sunshine

chief occupation—amazement

the settled doves bob violently
as the newcomer alights
and makes the branchtip
thrash

I have thrust myself
through my twenties
as a driver whipping
and cursing his mules
mile after mile
to the Great Divide

the effort
and now this impression
that nothing matters

this loneliness
alone or in the presence
of love

the deeds
the old deeds read
 in consideration of the sum
 of Eight Hundred Silver Dollars (\$800)
 lawful money of the United States of America
 paid into the hand of John Schafter, seller

in the print of the old deeds
bronze faces appear
and flicker

this, gentlemen, was the great era
of railroads town fathers opening
the line from San Francisco
to Point Reyes

and here
Bear Valley Road

so named for the bears who preyd
on the cattle in these fields in
1961 the last bear in the region
a tame animal was felld
by a hunter while crossing this road
to the Smith home
for his daily ration of honey

I am crawling out of my poems
that thump like boxcars over switches

as I crawl head down
this impression of birds
on the wing in my body
formations of duck
geese and the air
thronging with elk
and fish migrating south
to Mexico

few
get the thrill of poetry
the amazement
the taste of an ultimate reckoning

doctors know
the flavors of fatal delight

here are the young newcomers
bright of eye
who live with children
in shacks up on the ridge
they read the old National Geographics
exclaim pointing
to this and that in pictures
amazed amazed
as Skipper Jack goes on

at night they light candles
and dance in their homes

or laughing so hard
it hurts holding their sides
gasping tears in their eyes
groaning weak at the start
of a fresh burst

speaking before the board
Professor Friskie expresst horror
that local land developers
were building houses that
straddle the 1906 break

the tubby woman
in the store
has not smiled since Paleocene times
she follows Stephen
up and down the aisles
his dress harks back
protruding from his pocket
is a book of no concern to me
a ribbon
he she watches
his hands near the nailbin
follows his eyes that roam
smiling over pictures
and displays rarely
does he buy the merchandise who
can blame her for denying him
her hairy lip
and her roofing nails
or the many other blessings
of a goodly countrie
once the home of Indians
the Coast Miwoks who

opposite Grandi's Hardware
the Silver Dollar Saloon

right, the hunting season
was over but old Guido here
he ain't one to let something like that
so coming up Bear Valley
in his quarter ton and this buck
three forks 20 inches across
he pulled over got him his gun
but it was three weeks before he
then

at any time
the old dog is game
for a walk and a visit
to friendly shacks she
flops along the road
on her three sounde legges
seeing but dimly
our scent equally strong
in both directions
often getting confused in the dark
turnd around she
bobs away from us
further and further away

the chain is down the lock
open the cut-rate priests are home!
heavy souls heavy investors
they they maiming
the neighbors' trees
to widen their view
Sunday when they drive
to their cathedral their outdoor phone
will ring ring ring

feel strongly
we because
then too therefore

within the print
flicker the bronze faces

here the veins
of gold lay in a southward slant
thinning out
to disappear from sight

this, old buddy
is the Silver Dollar Saloon
it's like the old days a rough bunch
we shot first asked questions after

at the bar sits a woman alone
pretty thirtyish she makes
the men uneasy rumors
yeah she's retarded has slipped
her guardians taken their car
the men leave her alone
at closing time she leaves alone
too drunk too drunk
crushes a fender on Bear Valley Road
at 18 miles per hour a body
has a thrust of eighty pounds
weeping quietly she
staggers up and down the road
where the old dog

see the school
this is the class of problem children
Tom is shouting "Fuck!"
look at Teacher scratch her head
Teacher writes the word

on the board she tells us
what it means

look at the faces of the schoolboard
see them sign the paper
sending her away

school the board to school
or board the school

the board heard
this broad was wife
to a black stud well hung
who fucks her in bed
at night Teacher squeals
with delight

on this sunpoured day
an outing with kites
homemade bread a driftwood fire
of whisky cases washd in
from a ship unloaded at sea a
wreckd rumrunner lies on the beach
Skipper Jack is passing around
the pleasure pipe he
continues this disquisition
Anne listens charmd in lace
and puffy sleeves today
Stephen is turning the pages
of an old magazine

Far away
hidden in sunpoured dunes
reclines an Aztec god
he is young
immense
of the beach itself
bronze on copper sand

he she in beads
a crown of shells
is a tender princess
never so sweet
her lips at his golden tusk
never so soft
her tongue
impossibly gentle
the maiden
evoking
his fatal delight

the San Andreas Fault
slants south through California
into Mexico
where it sinks from sight

In the U.S. post office
a single bulb
reveals the official photograph
Teddy Roosevelt squinting from the wall
pepper-eyed bewhiskerd
his face a contentious pucker
this light will expose
the Thieffe
rifling letters of acceptance
for my railroad poems
Stephen will stop at nothing
for an invitation to speak
to a local board he
would steal nails
were it not for a bulb
burning cautiously over the bins
to frustrate foul play
a desk lamp shines
in the real estate office
lest a body break in

to ponder the instruments by flashlight
one without Rightfull Businesse
among the deeds our old deeds
then too faces
are known to flicker there

the Constable too is abroad
in the hostile darkness his
bicycle-size tires
make no noise his
armature and brushes
propel him in the silence
of the hornd owl
slung and desperate
he is eager to fling his string

few
sense the sanity
of nonsense
a mad recipe
 one cup—pain
 one cup—hilarity
for poppyseed cakes
of amazement

in the National Geographic
three Black Hawks are ambushing
their pursuers this brave
crawling into the brush
has received a shot
in the groin

men of distinction
shaped the history of Point Reyes:
Sir Francis Drake, favorite of Queen Elizabeth
Zachary Taylor, twelfth President of the United
States
John Schafter, Supreme Court Justice of this State

doctors know
the fatal flavors

a wreck! Bear Valley
Saturday night after the Silver Dollar closed
three men in a pickup truck
forced an old heap
off the road
at 50 miles per hour a body
has an impact of fifteen hundred pounds

the village glowing at dawn
the village aglow in golden light

out of the wreck
the survivor crawls
on hands and knees

in 1963, despite firm opposition from
despite resistance
the U.S. Government purchased
23,000 acres of in
for the Point Reyes National Seashore

the apprentice barber
runs the clippers too far too far
into the grey hair he
dissolves in helpless laughter
levity Mr. Jones, himself helpless
in sheet and tissue collar
cannot share

here are the old the dim of eye
who live with hairless pooches
in shacks up on the ridge
they wait

on dirt roads
at gates
by blackberry bushes heavily bearing

to speak to you
to say to you their fathers once own'd acres
hundreds of own'd own'd
land once the home of Indians
now becoming fields
of sorrow and love

in the grainy photograph
I am standing deeply recess'd
at a gate on a dirt road
my arm is around my mate
from a pocket protrudes
this present instrument roll'd
tied with a ribbon

roll'd over the edge
a heavy burlap sack
all but the hooves and antlers

Stephen's hour has come
apprehended hitchhiking
on a Darke Waie
he dashes to a tree
to conceal his Presence
the horn barks
the string is flung
torn from his jerkin
his flared trousers
his reading matter removed
he is thrust into prison stripes
propelled to the dock
the charge "assault"
Anne arrives with bail
she cooes and soothes him
across the rail an arm
pulls her away a stern voice
prohibits Communication

with Prisoners
from a distance she continues
to console him
through Handsignals seized
arrested shorn of her lace
and puffy sleeves thrust
into prison stripes
propelled to the dock
she faces the judge
at Stephen's side

the suppressst hilarity
the struggle to keep a straight face

the sparrow hawk
sacred to ancient peoples
his wings do not pound
like axles over switches
yesterday he did not anguish
for his fitness for today
he has natural business
in the pourd valley
in the thick
the now
renewing himself daily
his moulting feathers
fall away in flight

the young man
and his friend, the widower
walk arm in arm
along the road
they pause at the gate
to wait for the old dog they
talk quietly
this is his father-in-law
the lucid the beloved

himself in the album
in the chest
a young man smiling
at outings in a wide-brimmd hat
guitar in hand and
thumb hookt through his belt

the Surveyor
ponders an instrument
with the Real Estate Man
this is the office
built like a rustic cabin
at the crossroads
the old deeds are here
likewise the Rod and Transit
money accrues as the two the two
subdivide love
into fourths
and eighths

the young are perplext
they cannot buy
a single sorry nail
amazement does not beget
money money money
money money
does not yield itself up
from laughter it
does not issue from sunlight
no the money
she don't just won't accrue

to roll on axles
into the west

to turn away
and slant toward the south

on July Fourth
the main street
aflow with cattle
noses bobbing
horns rippling lowing
their hooves drum up
an ancient sorrow
their knobby knees
stir in me
a southward throb

knees plunging raising
the golden dust

I turn my head
I renounce the archaic struggle
migrating patterns flicker
in these words
this instrument takes us south
to Mexico the sorrows
of beaten brass
to gold by firelight
the sensual craving satisfied
love delicious
in soft leather beads
these are the bronze andirons
wrought as the sparrow hawk
ruby eyes wings folded
the plunging
down down
into the glow
to the cities in the embers
the ancient cities
the ancient peoples
glowing down
from gold to red
to disappear from sight

I have sought a father's love
in a man unable to love

the toddling boy
crawls from his sire
as from an ambush
or a highway wreck

following me
on hands and knees
dwarfs in diapers
each with my face
grim as miners
desperate as miners
crazed with thirst

the struggle to crawl free
to raise my head
to rise
to rise to my feet

you will forgive me
these sorrows
for I am slow
no fit companion
yet my head is up
I am trying to
I my body
to raise my
trying
to rise
to my feet
to you

William Whitman

LEAVING, THE SEPULCHRE CITY

The place was empty.
We entered the room
where the heads lay
upon the table,
formaldehyde, wrinkled.
The door closed behind us.

1.

What happened when the lieutenant
came over to you?

He asked me why
I hadn't killed the people yet.
I said, 'Sir, I didn't know
we were suppose to.'

What happened then?

Well, the lieutenant pulled
his automatic to his shoulder
and started shooting.

What did you do ?

I started shooting too.

How did you feel about shooting
all those people ?

You get kind of used to it, sir,
used to the killing, that is.

But some of the men say you
were crying as you fired. Were you ?

I don't know.

Alot of things were going on
around me—alot of people
running around and alot
of noise all over the village.
I don't remember crying.

But you do remember
the people you shot, don't you ?

Yes sir.

Would you say
most of those you shot
were adult men ?

Some were.

Then the others were women
and children.

Yes.

How old were the children ?

All ages, sir. Some
were, maybe, ten, eleven.

Some were in the arms
of their mothers.

Did you shoot them too?

Yes I did.

Did you think
that the children
were going to harm you?

No sir. But they
might have had a grenade planted
on them. You really
can't trust anyone, sir,
not anyone.

*We have placed the people
in the corner, we have gone
around the bush to the other
steeple hidden by rocks and danced
upon the cave. We took off
our shirts and we took off our pants
and sat them by our feet. The brook
ran through the fire
but we knew it was good
and laid down with the girls.
We had no desire.*

2.

Deep, in the earth,
it was broken
and we were men
painting buffaloes
on the slate rivers.

The women and children
slept near the fires.
The one behind me,
the one who walks
in the valley
beneath the shadow
of the big, yellow fire,
wraps our people
in dried skins.
We do not like
the air we cannot see
for it eats our people.
We do not like our blood
that shakes our bodies
over the animals
on the stones
for the elephant
chases us when he is hidden
and the small deer
who feeds us no longer
drink from our lands.
We are empty
with bark, root, and berry.

3.

How many hours
is it? In the darkened hole
of the tavern, the men
sat on stools or stood
by the bar. The Budweiser
horses revolved around a table,
neighed once or twice,

then dragged their old cart
back home to the stable.
The women's band, just
finishing the last round
of drink was standing
by the wall, wailing
to the one, asleep,
laid, her back half bent
across the floor. The two men,
the two men close
to the window, kissed
each other's ear. The one
with two fingers opened
the other's graying shirt
and felt his breast, then,
seeing us outside staring in,
sensed the fear of the rising
wind, the last slow circuit
of the clicking of tin,
the last clicking of tin.

*We were riding
in the city then, along
the lake, just before
sunset. By the beach,
we dug into the sands
with our bones way
past midnight.*

*I came from the old buildings,
she said, and remembered them
along the drive. They are not
the same, no they are not, he said.*

*Now the city condemns them,
even drops the people's furniture
from the twelfth floor,
she said. They did that to me
without one thought for my dress
nor how well I could speak,
she said. Yes, I suspect
it is true, he said. People are
so cruel these days, so cruel.
The kids, they junk the new cars
along the streets, she said,
and throw rocks at your windows.
It is a shame it has come
to this, she said.
I have no home now, he said,
not since the war.
My parents think
I am dead, he said, yes, dead
because I deserted. That
can't be true, she said. No,
it isn't but I love you.
Do you believe that, he said.
Yes I do. Will you let me,
he said. Yes, I want it.
Do you want me now,
he said. Yes, now, I need
you now, she said.*

What happened when
you entered the car?

We talked about the weather.
It had been sleeting all day.

Did he touch you?

Yes, you could say that.

Where?

On the leg. He reached
over as though he
were fixing the tape deck
and bumped my knee.

What did you do then?

I tried to ignore him.

Did you?

Not really, I mean, he did it
again, this time more frantic
than before, putting his hand
on my calf and then, quickly
working it up a little
pass the knee.

Did you like it?

What? I'm not sure
what you mean.

You understand what I mean.

Well, I was a little
scared. My stop was soon
and, when I went to get out,
he tried it again.

What happened then?

I got out.

I was pretty shook, then,
and just wanted to get away.
Even so, maybe out of habit,
I said, 'thank you'.

4.

She has tight,
protruding eyes. She is behind
the counter, holding
the ketchup bottle
near her hand. When we leave,
she follows us to the theater
where she plays a waitress
going out and going out
with a tray over her head.
You call out to her
but she is speaking
to her grandchildren,
at 29, the only performer
left alive.

Virginia Gilbert