



**National Library
of Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada**

Canadian Theses Service

Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

BRICK
a novel

by
Grant Loewen

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

March 1989

© Grant Loewen, 1989



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-51332-2

Canada

ABSTRACT

BRICK
a novel by

Grant Loewen

Brick is a novel of approximately 180 manuscript pages. Brick is an eighteen-year-old boy in his last year of high school. The story of his weekend begins on a Thursday morning in October, 1968 and focuses on the time he spends in his car, a blue '64 Comet. He has friends in the car at lunch, drives to the bush to see his older brother, Wire, with a case of beer in the trunk after school, and from there drives north to drop Wire off at the lake where he keeps his float plane. Brick returns to town the next day, picks up his girl friend, June, and two others who work with him on the student paper at school. They drive to the city and meet with disaster.

Brick's story is a text file entered by Brick, a forty-year-old technical writer, whose own consciousness and personal history are displayed on the monitor via notes, letters, downloads and uploads addressed to publishers, friends and family.

Thematically the conversations, dreams, flashbacks and reflections deal with religious and political ideas surrounding the military/ecological ruin of the earth. The dramatic link to Brick's sad weekend, the text production of the lonely narrator, and the experiments in narrative technique combine to expose a contemporary white male consciousness among collapsing worlds.

I'm sitting at my desk watching the sky's glare blink on and off across the glass face of the monitor. Fallow fields and gravel roads are popping thermals up against a low-level dew-point in cool July morning air and the dogtooth pattern of cumulus clouds intermittently blocks the summer sun and clarifies the text. No one's home, so, a good time to tap the keys and enter the story of Brick.

This isn't that easy. Brick's a selfish bastard for one thing.

\Oxford Digital: LOOKup mode

\Type word and press RETURN to display definitions; press CTR-P to PAUSE screen display; press CTR-R to RESUME scrolling; press ESC to end search and reset LOOKup mode.

\Word: bastard[HRT]

\1. a. born out of wedlock, illegitimate; (of things) unauthorized, hybrid, counterfeit; (Bot. & Zool.) closely resembling another species

\2. n. bastard person; (colloq.) disliked or unfortunate person or thing[ESC]

What species does he resemble? How other is it? Or how

other is he? Brick is none of the above, really. Can't get the dictionary to cooperate anymore. Maybe he's altogether alien. And what, for instance, does born out of wedlock mean? That he was born after his father's death? That's true enough. But then Wire's not a bastard because he was born a few months after the wedding was locked up. Is that fair? Brick is selfish, though, at least ornery. We don't see eye to eye, that's sure.

I'll just swing that door shut. Macy always shut it. I think it was to keep her imaginary friends in and her real ones out. The window, though small and high in the wall - - the standard awning unit for a bedroom in bungalow plan #51, Meadowlark Series -- should have curtains pulled across it but Macy took them; or her mother for her.

A sky pours in and on the screen I now see it's a sky that requires me to imagine a landscape below it. I can't honestly write Brick while looking at that kind of prairie in that sky. I mean, I might, but even a bastard character gets respect around here and right now I picture Brick in his adolescence still hanging on tightly to a privileged notion of a prairie sky that's still friendly and wholesome. He wants his own prairie sky and who can blame him? I want it for him. This one could be expanding someone else's horizons elsewhere and be shining through this window only incidentally, not really for Brick, just a gloss on the text.

Brick is eighteen, has a 5'8" chunky body and a fat round

head on which flattened sprays of short brown hair are mismanaged. He never wears glasses. He lives in his mom's trailer in the trailer-court behind Jerry's Highway Grocery, shaves with a Philishave inherited from his father, wears shirts, socks and underwear that his mother buys him and a suit to church where he's president of Young Peoples -- he gets a key for the church and one for the janitor's room under the stairs in the church basement and has to clean up and lock up after the Tuesday night get togethers.

He drives a '64 four door Comet that his brother Wire helped him buy and put on the road last winter. All it needed was a tune-up. Wire had it in his machine-shed at the house one weekend and installed a complete Bosch ignition system in it: runs like butter. Brick is busy at school this year, occupied chiefly as editor of the student paper, the biweekly Sabre Truth, and serves as well on the '68-69 yearbook committee. Studies are going OK: he's at or near the top of his classes in math, physics and chemistry and scrapes by on the good will of his history and English teachers, who are impressed by class participation. Once a week he drives out to the St. Einbach Bible School, near my place now and since accredited with the American Evangelical College Association, for a Tuesday night class in biblical eschatology: Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature.

Before her business picked up, Brick's mom used to have "the ladies" over on weekday afternoons for Scrabble. On

these occasions, sitting in his room after school, laughter would rip into Brick's ears and crack his skull, it felt like. Ear bones jumped at the initial wave and relayed alarm, unfiltered, uninterpreted, to a tendon in his shoulder (also, simultaneously, to the guard hairs in his nose because what attacks the ears might fly up a nostril - - it's the protocol for indiscrete multi-buzzing enemies) via Brick's attentive and efficiently switching synapses. Another signal fed an advance warning station, where the elements of terror were identified and fast tracked through a decisive group of interpretive cells, then bundled off with the file on ladies' Scrabble straight to the director's office. The women must have understood that the words gathering on the pews before them were responsible; wood block words that jostled and shook through serial secret permutations within the crinkled paper bag folded down twice (just as the cuffs of new jeans, purchased in thrifty anticipation of long legs, are folded up); which then struggled up, bumping, dividing, turning over in the calm, mixing, cooking, sock-washing fingers that lifted them up and sat them on pews; correct and proper words that nevertheless allowed themselves wicked thoughts, thinking of their neighbours, glancing ever more shamelessly around the board, right before their makers' eyes: defiantly walking eyes, lifting like knees, falling like feet coolly on sidewalk slabs -- step on a crack, break your mother's back -- eyes up, eyes down; words that gather on their pews

obedient to these deft fingers and focused eyes narrowing possibilities, fixing on a word, on this particular word placed nonchalantly . . . and there must be a noise not reaching Brick but a noise gathering in the skin around the eyes, all eight eyes, six looking past their pews at the word whose turn it is, while it builds -- could it be? could it? It's the calm before the noise, the imperceptible loading of each and every lung, inhaling to capacity, every eye open, pressurized, every air atom wondering: whether to break into discreet sections to administer the verification and counting chatter of a good word, for points, or, whether to split from every alveolus at once and hurl four howling gale-force winds through four throats; tissue shredding, wet, ripping winds from four directions colliding over the board. Unlady lungs lean into that wordwind. Eyes, rolled as high as their ligaments allow, look at that bad word --

huge sucking word before which not a molecule of breath can stick in a lung. Every lung collapses, blown, not a memory of air, not a thought for another breath ever: a candle at the bottom of the sea? a hurricane passing over? an eye of bomb-light too white for colour. The next stillness: eight lungs as one, eight ears deafened, eight eyes glossed and desperate for agreement, for witnesses to the news in all that whimpering hard porn air in front of them. Soon, a rumour in the air: that all the air in the trailer has to go back again, soon, into these bodies. The bad word steadily arrives through successive waves of laughter:

arranged and straightened, sociable, exchanged and counted.

Brick, who'd fallen out of his hunched position at just this moment many times before, twisted in his chair, acknowledged the itch in his nose, and looked at the wall near the corner and just below the ceiling: white wallboard panels converging with each other and the ceiling tile, also white, fibrous and pocked. All the air in the trailer takes longer each time to go back into the lungs, rasping, reverential. Each woman is a long time filling, polite, staggering their quota, willing to die out of courtesy, out of gratitude for the revelations percolating out of that very bad word resting before them. Cake: swirled and folded batter in a mixing bowl spatulated cooperatively by eight hands, coffee, and that bad word so rich and bad.

Fortunately for Brick there was often a spider on the ceiling to which he could look for instructions before the next collapse of the firmament.

\EDN

Dear Edna,

It just occurred to me that radio weather reports have evolved into a genre of commercial fine art known as high hopes and doom. Ever notice how rich in manipulation they are? Each descriptive word choice, every inflection of voice carries a supercharged code, all the more because the topic is so familiar. It's propaganda in near pure form; a propaganda of fear. I'm afraid when I hear that a cold

front will bring clear skies today and tomorrow because I might suddenly head up north and not get my work done. Or I might try to work, but wishing I was up north get nothing done, not even my shopping. Then the day after tomorrow a howling blizzard will move in and it'll be too late to shop! I sha'll have to work at home, not go out for supper, survive a night in bed impotently watching cold medicine ads. And if the climate last night was hostile, it is reported in order to frighten me out of bed early in order to shovel, to mobilize and move me into the market with all haste. Didn't I hear you tell Sheilagh at that dinner that I should be in retail? I think you're right. Skies interpreted as hostile and exploited for fear have their perfect match in consumer anxiety. I can feel it in my bones, Edna: show me a sky, any sky, and I won't stop shaking until I've run up a large charge on my Canadian Tire card.

love,

BJ

\LTR_1189.EDN

On Thursday morning, 10 October, 1968, Brick wakes up before the timer on the stove clicks. The trailer is full of light and he thinks, "Damn, I'm late, I'm the only one in the world without an alarm clock." But his mom's still asleep: he's confusing himself. The windows are wet with condensation and the usually pitiful yard light amplified

a hundred times by the first snowfall, fills the trailer with white light. Brick wipes a patch of glass with the curtain and peers out: no snowflakes dance, wet globs hurtle down in straight lines. Still, the stuff is white and it's accumulating. Ploughs are out. "They did the highway past my place at 6:30 already," Brick anticipates saying sometime that day. The comfort of knowing that public works workers are working their odd overtime hours helps him in the diffuse light. He sleeps peacefully for an hour and a half before the stove clicks.

That black stain on the sill, there under the varnish next to the awning crank, is my blood. It's from a cut -- one of many in a life of thumbing my nose at the safety tips. When I installed the window I left the point of an errant vapour barrier staple sticking out of the side jamb. A few minutes later it caught my thumb cuticle and opened it just enough to release that drop. This room was my study originally: for the first few weeks after moving the family in. But the daughter, in a cute conspiracy with her mother, expropriated it for herself and I worked in the living room until the basement was finished. If I moved the computer down there now, Brick would probably come easier, surrounded by cement and wallboard. That wallboard draws more attention to the poured concrete behind it than to itself, which is nice, unusual for wallboard. The 14" sliders down there, also curtainless, emit into the basement the light

that gathers against the cement outside, nothing more.

The distortions Brick wants for his world ought to be written in a setting like that. His story requires a particular place and a peculiar light: the kind of space suited -- no, what I'd really like is to cut a figure out of stone; that is, out of my monumental memory of him. I say "monumental" because I can't say I know Brick anymore, or would recognize him in photographs taken before he crashed the car.

Or after, for that matter. Anyway I'm not about to dig into his mom's box of certificates, clippings and yearbooks to document his accomplishments. The best I could say for him was the courage he showed for nearly two years with his leg: serial operations, in and out of casts, infections, healing and rehealing. It can be a consciousness raiser: encourages contemplation. He never tried to get back into hockey but the leg is at least functional, and the occasional curling bonspiel, with a broom to lean on, was still possible. Brick probably favoured it too much later, driving everywhere, avoiding stairs. Xed wasn't so lucky. He'll be in a wheelchair the rest of his life. You've got to live with guilt and regrets, I guess, whoever you are, and Brick managed it.

Occasionally I still feel him in what's left of my muscles. Otherwise I make contact, if that's an appropriate word for something more like bouncing off a force field, through his brother, Wire. At least his name kept its hard,

concrete shape and hardened. 'Brick' was a middle name that stuck, and he never wanted or needed to change it.

So I think Brick's is definitely a basement story. And if I move my stuff downstairs, my daughter's room will be nearly as she left it. She'd like that: to stay here sometime. I'll buy her a fabulous new desk, a word processor of her own. Put back the doll's house if she has any nostalgia for it.

Brick's brother Wire is not as difficult to write about because I know him: my brother, Wendel. I'd say we're close. White skin, straight brown lightweight hair, tall and lanky. Around the house on weekends he wears a black pile lining unzipped from a worn out canvas parka shell and grey sweat pants. He's nine years my senior and lives in the city where he runs a superb little landscaping business. He and Shirley spend months at a time down south every winter: a trailer in Arizona.

He never said this outright, I guess, but thanks to Wire I've had to fight the idea for some time that the manuals published under my pseudonym, Cam Stylite, are misguided. Starting out, however, they were a heartfelt contribution to our consumer society. "If you're handy," Wire, who is handy, said recently, "you're a hero and guru in cottage country and all across suburbia on Saturdays. No secret among those of us fixed in single family addresses that favours come to those who fix-it-themselves. Even if we pay others to do it we can rest assured of our money's

worth."

"So? You do all right for yourself," I might have said, trying for the last word.

Obversely, when you're selling into the market of consumer information Monday to Friday as I am, and you don't have know-how but can write know-how as I don't but can, then there are bucks to be had (but alas, no favours). Specifically, it was technical manuals that tipped the horn of plenty my way: service, operational, end-user documents. Not because I was a whiz kid fixer or compulsive delver into the miracles of consumer toys and retailed convenience, but because words have always organized themselves in front of my eyes the way filings line up in a magnetic field. I could not help but write technically nor resist recruitment to the "disassembly-line" of know-how. Troubleshoot! Replace parts! Reassemble! Test! Written Assurance for the klutzier inhabitants of this do-it-yourself world that we (I include myself) will not die if we fix it. But of course we might. Anyway, I assumed the title, Technical Writer, and wrote the scriptures of technical salvation for which the marketing forces have rewarded me. My card:

TRUE RELIGION, INC.

technical text management

Brick James

Phone: 204-555-1234

FAX: 204-555-4321

Do I sound the cynic? It's humility. I still try to live in this society without feeling humiliated every time I spend money, or vote, or take a shit. Fortunately there is such profound respect for my technical skills that as long as I don't renounce them -- i.e., refuse to profess know-how -- the cynicism is merely cute. Who gives away a social and economic advantage for a trifle? Someone very hungry.

The urgency in my youth to get established, to make hearth and home, is my excuse. My infant head of course had sucked in, filled with, and hardened around the immigrant community's landed images of God, family and nation. But these images had begun to shift and crack three generations ago and by my time were well mudded up, still bony but sunk in the warming beaver ponds of dammed and busy springtime industries, goods and services. Sorry, I can't seem to get the metaphors for the heart of this country to lie down and hold still. Oh, the place is a significant piece of crust, true. Back then it even looked like land: continental, solid, mineral-bearing. I staked claims, worked the load,

stoked the technological urges, forged . . . I know: these are the figures of speech Uncle Gord inspires! I like Uncle Gord but Wire doesn't. I know why he doesn't and agree, so yeah, I don't like him either. I mean, what he stands for I detest but he himself is OK when Wire's not around. So I built this house on swamp. Joy Mason and I married, we raised a child, then I built these walls and moved us in. My work was steady, often difficult, but lucrative enough from the beginning. We kept ourselves comfortable, warm, and well fed. The child and her mother have left me these walls and windows.

\UPLoad Peter

I thought we'd got that business over with; washed ourselves clean of it. Now I'm not sure. An RCMP guy came by this morning. How many years has it been? A followup visit? "Just to chat," he said.

Well, remember the scenarios we used to run through trying to conjure up those CIA counter-intelligence scams? The part about the changed identity they could give you if you were exposed? Well, too bad I never connected with the Russians: I could be a new man today, Peter. Although this guy only knew what he'd read in the files, he described the sting we were recruited for pretty well. And he knew something I didn't. There had in fact been a contingency plan to hustle one or both of us into their protection program. "If the sting had gone ahead we would have assumed

you to be a target for assassination," he said.

"Or a target for recruitment?" My tone was hostile so, to recover, I said I watched too much TV hoping he'd assume I have one. Nose cones for Christ's sake, Peter. Every missile in the world has an outer skin. And Bristol's Winnipeg contracts in the Minuteman project must be common if not ancient technology by now. OK, so they're still deployed, but what could I possibly know about missile casings that anyone else doesn't? Can I tell the Russians how to detect them? [When your body turns into a thousand trillion points of light, Mikhail, you'll know it's arrived.]

Or do they want to give me more work? Didn't the church send a prominent board member over to talk to the Bristol executives about our conscientious objection so they'd take their defence contracts elsewhere? You tell me, Peter. After the confession I thought we'd be white as snow; washed in the blood. "It's been twelve, fifteen years!" I told him.

"Yeah," he said, "but the file won't be declassified for at least forty."

I hope the Lord does his washing more often than that, Peter. I feel like a sock left behind in the laundry basket. These guys are responsible for my breakdown, or breakup, both. I never want to see them again.

You know what I want now? I'd like to go back to that same camp on Knee Lake you set me up in that painful winter.

I loved the rough-hewn beauty of it; that snowed in, walled in space -- one armpit-deep path to the outhouse the only possible trip. It was exactly the metaphor I needed then to learn how to live with 'my damaged soul' again. Now I might say 'damaged skin'; what's a soul? No mail, no calls, a cupboard full of grub, supply of wood, supply of fuel, a 2500 watt Onan, stuffed chair by the fire to write in: me and the laptop. That kind of loneliness is sanctioned. Friendly eyes at the windows.

Don't worry. I'm really not afraid of these guys anymore. What I know about rockets now has no market value anywhere. And I won't run out on you before the Rec Room copy is through fact checking. I'll have the outline for 'suspended ceiling light fixture installations' to you by the end of the week. I'm getting excellent information from a manufacturer in Montreal.

\ready RCM_L189.MIS

For some purpose under heaven, as they say, I still live on this prairie, in open fields not far from town, spending hours every day looking through windows. When I'm not at the keys I limp about the bungalow, stop at one picture window or the other, and sweep the plains and skies with my sharp green eyes. I'll be properly senile one day, or VDT blind, and step through the back door into one of these summer suns, the screen door will slap and I'll turn left instead of right on the back steps and fall breach into the

rain barrel. Busted hip, slipping in and out of consciousness, undiscovered, I'll observe my death in a blue sky with a barrel rim around it.

\Grade Two

On his first ever wood hunt Brick bounced along in the cab of the grumbling, slithering half ton. (Had Wire been along? He couldn't remember. No, his uncle Gordon had borrowed Wire's truck.) They broke trail along the still serviceable but unploughed bush road, swung off and lurched through a shallow ditch into a clearing: smooth, trackless snow glazed by the sun.

"Doggone it. We hit the deep part of that ditch. There's a culvert crossing somewhere here. Further up, it must be." Uncle Gord halted the steaming truck and walked twenty yards further along the road's edge, testing ditch depth with stamps of his snowmobile-booted feet every few steps.

"Here. Brick. Come stand on the road here and wave the boys to turn in right here. Otherwise we'll be towing all the Fords back, eh?" He chortled in such a way as to mock someone chortling at his own joke. Brick directed three trucks into the clearing. A fourth went by and accelerated: someone going somewhere else.

The tractor with the belt-driven crosscut rig on the back arrived later and made its way through the ditch. A chainsaw fired and was left to purr on a boot-cleared patch of dirt. The crosscut parked, tailgates dropped, the

cousins roughhoused on an expanding field of leaf and dirt strewn snow. It was the Saturday after the first ever air raid practice at school. For hydrogen bombs you didn't go outside, only for fires. Instead, you filed into the hall, crouched along the wall, and waited for the 'all clear' over the intercom. Brick wondered if they'd hear the town siren from here.

Suddenly the chainsaw ripped across the voices to signal the start of the annual wood hunt. Brick was proud and self-conscious among uncles, cousins, and other assorted big guys he knew the smell of in church but not here. After serving as marker on the road Brick's next attempt to help took him away from the tearing, shouting circle of machines and men and into the bush to scout for good trees. But although he could direct trucks with a wave he could not do business in wood with his tenor commands.

"Oh yeah? Right. Good. Just going to take these near ones first."

"What?"

"Big ones in there, yeah?"

"No, no. Too far to drag those."

Brick wandered further out among the concentric levels of diminishing noise. He pressed his mitts hard over his ears and waited for the quiet lonely sensation that was implied in the black-lined and pitted whiteness all around him. But noises got through and scattered his attention. He'd walked another fifty yards further from the society of fuel cutters

when a surge of desire to escape suddenly bewildered and pinned him to his tracks. Brick looked into the eye of a rabbit. Stretched full length along the bottom of a kicked out trench, it lay on its side fringed with ice.

He stepped back and looked around him. This was normal. Someone who knew how could skin it. The sounds of work were still there. The men were there. Brick stepped carefully around the rabbit. What comfort did the rabbit have, one eye looking up, in its last instant? While running along its well-worn trail did it know what he already knew in grade two: that the world would end in a flash, any day; that we'd rise like Jesus on Easter morning? Glancing up for an instant he saw the tiny crooked lines of poplar branches reaching towards the centre of a blue iris, then he looked back at the rabbit.

It was not a sleek white flying creature. It had scruffy dirty fur and places where tufts of it were missing. Brick bent down and tugged at the rear feet. The rigid body easily lifted out of its mould in the snow, much too light for the size of its paws. He would show his prize to the men. A branch jerked beside him and Brick saw the copper gleam of a wire attached to it. The wire disappeared into the fur behind the rabbit's head where Brick searched for an instant but discovered only the tiniest loop, smaller than his little finger. He quickly set the body down exactly as it had been and turned back towards the hard laughing voices.

The bush came alive with the roar of a half ton. Brick's big cousins heaved at the jolting truck as gears and clutch plates locked horns with the flying motor.

"She's moving!"

"Stand back!"

The cousins slapped bark, dirt and snow off their clothes, stamped, pulled off steaming mitts and caps. Everyone stood still to watch the truck inch along at slow crazy angles. The back end lifted, tires found the elevated tracks and the truck settled into a self-satisfied idle on the bush road.

Mr. Dirksen, who had the knack of moving his jaw sideways to help make a point, turned and slapped his pants and pronounced that you just keep her going.

"You just don't stop once you're moving. If you keep her going you're out. Same as mud."

Everyone knew that Mr. Dirksen had kept her going last spring on that low, slimy section road they'd never ploughed last winter. He'd been the first one through last spring.

"At least a mile of mud."

"Clean through."

And everyone knew, too, that he'd burned a half tank of gas and they could imagine how the tires were still sizzling in the dripping wheelwells for ten minutes. They were going to hear how that clutch still pulled the trailer up to the lake last summer. Full of cement and reinforcing rods for the cottage.

"Up that old hydro road they got up there."

Join me for daily devotions? Sorry: leg's stiff from sitting -- I'll just up and hobble over to the open Bible on the pulpit there in the hall by the front door. Wire thinks it's a great joke. "I can't stand to read the Bible," he says, "but you always do." It's true. The pulpit's a canoe trip souvenir Jim McIvor found near the mouth of the Saskatchewan River at Reader Lake. It was originally built in a shop in Portsmouth, England; one of a lot of ten shipped to York Factory by the Hudson Bay Company and delivered to post officials along the North Saskatchewan and Mackenzie Rivers to encourage Bible reading on Sundays. Jim suggested that the spiritual enlightenment of this country hadn't been left entirely to missionaries. This pulpit was either intercepted enroute or got shipped back to Reader Lake and Jim thought it probably had a chapel collapse around it because he pulled it from log house debris that included some bench seats. That was one trip I didn't make with him, but thinking of me and the trappings of my religion Jim paddled and car-topped the piece to my place. If you wish to follow along, turn to Psalm 74 in your King James Bible, verses 5 and following:

A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon
the thick trees . . . We see not our signs . . . O God,
plead thine own cause:

"I'm over here," she said, irritated at me for staring

out of the windows while I talked to her. Edna was over here, March a year ago now, I guess. She's going through a difficult time now I hear: bumped from teaching a first year intro to systematics back to administrative assistant, secretary to the academic dean. He has to give her a job (Edna's the president's sister-in-law) but he doesn't have to let her teach. Edna's by far the most widely-read and articulate scholar at the school in the Patriarchs and 16th century theology. That's at another bible college, an apostate one according to the one where Brick went. "At least you read something besides technical manuals," she said standing behind my pulpit.

She stuffed this in at Psalm 74:

-- All the force that is needed to go and love a leaf is called Clarice: the force of no longer being afraid to think from death to death all the way to the window. She opens herself. Gives us the hand capable of leading us, through the favella along the lanes of anxiety, through the ghettos, by way of the shantytowns, holds our hand, capable of finding through red-glowing memories, on the other side of the charnel-house, a leaf full of joys.

And it is not enough to look out of the window: it is also necessary to think about looking at the window, about taking the window in the transparent frame-work of long, reflective amazement, about discovering with

one regard after another all the treasures kept in a window, about summoning at the window all that a window holds in presents magically reserved for our pleasure, all that can come to pass from the opening of a window, come in, go out, begin, wait, contemplate, all that a window permits us, proposes to us, promises us.

Window: page of light. Temple. Where the eyes pray.

-- Hélène Cixous, l'Orange

"Let me know when you see the windows," she scribbled.

\UPLoad Peter

\RECREATE YOUR REC ROOM - Interior Walls

*T Wallboard.

*P1 Three keys to wallboard: 1) select the plainest pattern and lightest colour [if it looks as cheap as it is, you're less likely to get tired of it], 2) build a proper wall of studs and nail 3/8" or thicker construction grade plywood up first as a firm base for the decorative wallboard [again, why draw attention to a cheap wall by having it bend and bulge every time you lean on it] Note: to install wallboard on an outside wall, see insulating techniques, (page tk), 3) Use floor to ceiling length sheets to avoid horizontal seams, 4) plan the installation so that no seams line up with window and door frames. Note: replace entire sheets when repairs are required.

*EC

*SB Tips For Home Decorators.

*P1 Hang your children's art on wallboard walls with wide strips of masking tape applied along all four sides. This will serve as a frame for each piece while securing it at the same time. In time these borders discolour along with the paper and begin to peel at the edges. If pictures fall or partly fall, retape the previous borders, overlapping them 1/2 inch with fresh masking tape. When taped items are removed, the finish usually comes off with the tape. Simply tape larger items over these and other unsightly spots.

*ESB

\DO EDIT [for Peter Nojokes]

\not ready WAL_C189.RR4

\MAC

Dear Macy,

Dear Lovey Dove,

Dearest Macy,

Dear fuck this \DECIDE!!!!

\greetings

ask about school, car, tennis [done], Rosebowl, that earthquake: November something? \check - I worried, boyfriend's apt????

\text

I'm still working in your room. It was always "the study"

but you made it special, the time you had it. I'm thinking of bringing the doll's house back in and moving my office downstairs again -- a plan to redo it and solve the humidity problems, etc. I could leave this computer up here (I'll be getting new equipment any day -- keeping up, if that's still a valid concept, with my main publisher: yes, still Peter Toews). Anyway, I'll get you a desk for it, the software you use, etc. so if you ever need a place to write, a thesis etc., you can move in here. You're always welcome. I hope you can believe that. If not now, soon. And not because your mother's arguments aren't good ones. They're just not the whole story -- if that's still a valid concept! [see below, below, below]. But the room is yours whenever you come. Of course I thought it sentimental nonsense at first to 'keep' the room for you, in hope of a happy return. But I had those hopes; still do -- and they are sentimental as hell. So why disguise it? So now I'm moving out and the room is yours, etc.

\cut for last paragraph

I'm enclosing four birthday cards, all signed weeks before your birthdays, and the photographs I just got around to copying. They are their own apology, I'm sorry/ hate this hate this hate this hate this hate this hate this hate this hate this

\EEEEEEEDDDDDDDDDDDIIIIIIIIIIIIITTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

\DO

drop the slides off at Borlen's/x2 each/glossy prints

The trailer park was hit by a tornado summer before last and just now they get a miserable settlement. Brick's mom signs the cheque and places it on the table for him before she leaves for work. The farm where she does the bookkeeping Thursdays is too far from town for her to get to the bank at noon. So Brick, good son, steams about the cheque, about the fat farmer who won't pay her for today if she does two weeks of books next Thursday, and, hearing his mom's car starting, he steams about the snow tires still sitting in the trunk of his '64 Comet.

Behind the wet windows Brick eats puffed wheat while getting ready for school. When he flings open the door the world has changed. First snow flips his seasonal switches. A new protocol reroutes his anger, places him on a new earth among altered dwellings and machines. The conglomerate drops that hit him as he unlocks the passenger side door are a metaphor for nothing. They are wet and heavy and place a thickening white layer on every exterior surface.

But driving isn't half bad on the way to school. Leaving the trailer park Brick smokes the tires through the barrier of sludge at the highway and, the Comet refusing to line up with the road and he refusing to ease off on the accelerator pedal to help it, thinks about changing to snows right after school, then dismisses it from his mind. He'd defy the

weatherman's panic, defy the manager at Tow'N'Tire who will give him a hard time about the wear on the old snows and likely freak at the sight of a stripped wheel lug. He didn't need any delays after school if he was going to get to Wire's camp.

\UPLoad Peter

\MISCELLANEOUS

\What to do with a stripped wheel lug? It's not an everyday concern but common enough. I suggest we describe the repair in Complete Car Care; just so car owners know what it's about when they need tire work done and the mechanic tells them they've got a stripped wheel lug. No need to illustrate.

\Preliminary outline

\ck terms:

wheel lug /wheel stud /wheel lug nuts /wheel nut lug

*T Rethreading a Damaged Wheel Lug.

*P1 Try turning a new nut onto the wheel lug. If the lug is too badly damaged to accept the new nut, have it rethreaded to the next smaller dimension for which replacement wheel nuts are available. NOTE: Your car's manufacturer may not be one that distributes off-sized wheel nuts to their distributors in which case [they have you by yours] replace the entire hub.

*ET

\ready LUG_0139.CCC

Because his day is going to be too busy to plan, Brick concentrates on the car. It's a straight two mile shot along the highway into town, the snow thick and predictable under the wheels of the '64 sedan. If he can get to Wire's tonight with the beer he doesn't much care what happens today anyway. The Sabre Truth would be typeset by now and although Moore will go by the printers to look over the proofs and likely withhold his go-ahead over several spelling mistakes in order to make himself look stupid the bi-weekly student paper is likely to be at the exits at the end of the school day as usual. "Useful to stuff boots with tonight," Brick thinks. Then he concentrates on the road.

I imagine Brick's highway feels a little like the road I took to Wire's camp on a warm day in March: a thick winter road. That was the first out of town trip I made with the '64 Comet. Travel had compacted successive snowfalls into bony tracks and bonded them to the roadbed. Mine was the first vehicle to come along after the last cover and I had my hands full to maintain forty miles-per-hour. Through my grip on the wheel I negotiated the contract between summer tread and the twin backbones below the morning's snowfall. The tires slid off, searched, wrestled back up. Whenever I dared risk a glance at the speedometer the needle showed the same.

Even at forty a white luminescence quickly rose and fell in my peripheral vision. It was the doeskin moccasins of

dancing giants whose feet flew through the regions of black sticks on either side of the car; one of those mythologies on the outside of car windows. When rolled down the vision disappears but the magic is breathable for one breath.

Wire lived with Shirley and the kids north of our home town on the same geographic edge that runs like a fault line between bush and prairie in our province. A hundred enterprises kept him busy in one part of the southeast or another. In summer he raised bees, joined framing crews, custom combined, fought forest fires. But winters he cut wood: lumber, ties for CNR, pulp for the chipboard plant. From January to March he'd move into the bush, further east each year, wherever the cutting permits took him. He'd have set up his landing there in the fall: mill, trailer, supply shed. Once set up he'd find enough reasons to stay out there for days at a time even before cutting started. Weekends he made a point to be home.

I approached Wire's turnoff, turned, and, as if it sensed my own intimidation, the car immediately fell off the skewed tracks. I was barely off the road and stuck good but knew right away there was no point in going on with a noisy, rubber-smoking attempt to get back onto the disjointed trail to the trailer. My brother's skidder could make short work of it in any case.

"So, Sod, what have you come for this time?" Wire said after I'd pushed myself and the Old Stock into the trailer.

"You're not so terribly frightening," I said.

"Says who?" He indulged his first impulse to mock me, to piss around the boundaries of our love. "Me and the chainsaw've got the pines whispering, the aspens trembling and the birches shivering. Did you hear? Pop'lar 'pinion says I'm the number one fright throughout the riding."

"I guess not." For Wire, people and politics were a metaphor for the region's population of trees and their opinions. People lived beside roads, too, for instance. They had similar life expectancies to the sticks in this part of the world. They died in large fires, from old age, and at the hands of armed and licensed predators like himself. The metaphors were a way to deal with his isolation, I think.

Later we were overheating the trailer, working through the beer, and complaining about the wicked world; about how, here we were, thriving in local economies of thrift and industry for his part, of sprouting social and professional status for my part, and both of us unable to convince the other of a reason why, therefore, the world was damned: something we both knew, or felt, not knowing why. It was a rare topic between us. I think we adopted a feuding stance, politically, in order to avoid the subject after that.

I defended the political process that night. I said the process was democratic, responsible. Wire said it was a democratic joke, that the government was elected for the one thing it knew how to do: carry a mace. The walls and ceiling

of his trailer enclosed three pieces of furniture which defined a kitchen, a bedroom and a shop. The floor was a piece of worn white linoleum splotted with our rapidly drying boot marks. Wire set out a meal for us and while I ate and drank he moved back and forth between the kitchen end, where he produced graham crackers, cheese and tomato soup, and the shop end where the snowmobile's carburetor was being cleaned in a bath of gasoline. The fumes made it difficult to taste the cheese. The sheet metal stove glowed red around the base of its exhaust flue from the furious, nearly visible immolation of a stick of pine. Wire had added to my initial overdose of poplar sticks in order to boil the soup faster. An erratic heat spilled against my back and I started to sweat.

"I drank a lot of wine last winter but the freezer/oven cycle of temperatures in the trailer doesn't help it. It was better when I left the bottles outside and just threw them frozen into a pot of water on the stove until the ice disappeared. Sorry I don't have any left. Shil's batch from the fall was a small one this year -- we finished it up at Christmas. The poor crop of chokes must've discouraged her. You were there at the Wiebe's fiftieth, eh? That was Shil's wine -- the red. Chokecherry and white raisin -- nice colour."

As bottles increased on the table my democratic arguments emptied. I conceded that the political process in our part of the world did not work as a democracy might, yet it

depended on the democratic ideal to effect social control. Wire said the government's social contract with the people, beneath all the rhetoric, was a death warrant. I said no to this. I said that justice, however modest, was distributed to some who were otherwise oppressed and harassed, that improvements were effected by the influence of individuals on cabinet ministers directly.

"OK. Let's go. Let's go see a minister rightaway and effect one of those improvements." Just one of his brainy ideas we never acted on.

If Wire didn't like an opinion he immediately challenged it with a chainsaw, it felt like. I didn't like to see my ideas mocked but I had the presence of mind to change the subject. I had to hit him quickly and hard so I said, "What should I do next, Wire?"

"You? What you are doing, probably."

I chewed a wood chip. "Help me," I countered. "I want to figure things out, do something, get somewhere."

"Let's go to the lake. How much fuel's left in the car?"

"None. I could go for some. The car's stuck." I was confused. Needing what I thought Wire knew about stuff, I fell easily into his agenda.

"What's that? How much is in the car?"

"Enough to get back on. Not enough to get to Falcon Lake. But we can stop along the way. What's the problem?" I said, trying to recover from his manipulations. Yet I wanted to encourage his plan; to understand him. This time more than

ever. I wanted to know why he'd quit teaching for this hands-on life. No, I wanted to know what to do.

"What's my problem? What's yours?"

More confused, I blurted out: "Everything! Graduation for sure. Going away. Getting somewhere!" I was such an inarticulate asshole around Wire. Everything tugged in the wrong direction.

"Let's go to the lake," he announced. "I've got this guy's motoneige in payment for dock timber. You don't have to be back tonight, do you?"

"No. Of course not. But why don't we take my car?"

"Where we're going a snowmobile's faster. The machine needs gas is all. A minute before it ran out of gas I realized that every other piece of equipment around here runs on diesel. Good thing I was in the yard. Oil I've got in the shed there."

I got a length of hose and two fuel cans from a shed next to the mill and filled them from my car's tank according to his instructions.

"Will two cans get us there?" I asked politely.

"One will get us there, the other gets us back. You go as far as you get, one way or the other," Wire assured me.

I knew I hadn't left myself enough gas to get back to town on but I already felt too stupid to question him. I must have been desperate for some shred of guidance to put up with this pain-in-the-ass brotherhood. It wasn't Falcon as I'd assumed, but Whitemouth Lake to which we were going.

With the fuel from my car and several yanks on the starter cord Wire got noise from the snowmobile. I climbed on behind him and together we headed up one of the skidder tracks which ended a half mile from the landing in a maze of fallen trees and piles of brush: Wire's harvest of usable timber waiting for him to drag it out to the landing. I was struck by Wire's industry; the force in his hand, once applied, to make a living in this peripheral place. A problem developed.

"Can't get the power," Wire screeched over successive revving and dying sounds from the engine.

"What?" I shrieked in response, knowing full well the meaning of all the noises. Several surges of power got us turned around and back to the trailer.

"Have to look at that. Feels like a fuel supply problem." I followed Wire into the trailer and threw several sticks into the stove while he gathered handfuls of tools into a small tool box and went out. "Make some coffee: whatever you can find -- help yourself," he said, pulling the door shut.

I filled the kettle from a five gallon Reliant, placed it on the stove lid and listened to the contradictory sounds of small motor repair: whistling, coughing, blowing, spitting; never a word. I needed a play by play of what was happening to our transportation so out I went. Wire revealed nothing. "Can I get my flashlight?" I offered. Then I followed him in again where Wire placed a wet lump

of carburetor on the bench and beside it several nuts and washers that dropped out of his mouth into a greasy and, now I noticed, bloody hand. "Sorry. Is that bad?" I said.

"Just a knuckle. Let's have some coffee while I fix this: in the coffee tin there. It's easier to take the entire carb inside, clean the jets and I think the float was sticking. The thing's filthy anyway."

We took the same route, skirted the cut clockwise through some unpacked snow where the machine rolled slowly back and forth dodging trees, testing our balance. We came across an obvious trail that took us away from the scene of Wire's work and towards Whitemouth lake.

On the trail the going was good: bumpy but softened by the warmth. Without stopping Wire pulled his feet from under the engine cowl and kneeled diagonally across the seat.

The echoed roar of the machine receded to the back of my consciousness and a sense of solitude, before and behind, replaced it. Wire reached for a switch and extinguished the bobbing beam of light ahead of us. Silver light from a rising, bulging half-moon flickered through the passing sticks. The giants danced again without their slippers: muscular black wind-sculpted shapes. Now I had the leisure to seek them across the moving moon-mottled floor.

We veered off the track and struck a tree. I think the crack of the machine against the tree and the sudden silence spooked me less than the sight of Wire lying beside me in the snow. I found myself thinking about the nights we'd

spent in the same bed when I was a kid. I forget where, but I remember feeling abandoned in a foreign house where Wire had two friends who filled rooms with model airplanes, montgolfiers, electric devices, and where the air was crammed with adventure. This was the first time I'd listened to him breathe.

He didn't move and I, too, lay in bewildered comfort. I lifted my head to have a look at him. He was ghostly white but not visibly damaged. I waited for a grey-black spot on his forehead to lump up and explain his look of sleep. I stood up in deep snow and examined Wire's body in the moonlight. My shadow fell across him and I moved around, kneeling to examine his face.

Then an awareness of some sort confused me and I decided to rescue Wire, to call in a helicopter and fly him out within minutes to emergency, to brush the hair out of his eyes along the way, to hear him speak. I could not remember touching him before. But the helicopter wasn't coming, there was no phone, I could not even run the machine, or rather, it was wrecked. I carried the body draped across my back for about five hundred yards until I heard Wire's voice.

"How about cancelling the trip to the lake, kid, and turning us around?"

I put Wire on his feet and as he stood shaking and hanging on to me I felt the clean slicing shame of my mistakes: attempting to carry Wire, thinking I was taking him home

when I'd continued towards the lake, not thinking to make a camp and keep us both dry and warm. But then I didn't know Wire would speak or walk again. His concussion was serious and he suffered some delirious minutes on and off, but he could manage enough lucid moments to take over the tasks of his own survival and mine.

Wire walked back to the wreck clutching my shoulder for stability on the undulating trail, now pocked with the marks of my footsteps where I'd staggered off the hard track. Once under way, the rhythm of our exhaustion, our bobbing shadows, and the warmth of the work took over the task of moving us along. I felt the heat of my muscles against the shivers running along my damp skin. I was too warm or too cold, thinking I should know which.

I wanted to walk all the way back, to just keep going, but Wire had a look at the snowmobile and decided it could be run with a few makeshift repairs. He thought it was fifteen miles out; that we'd do better to try for ten miles-per-hour on the machine than walk for fifteen hours, if we could even do it in that.

My job was to build a fire, get myself dried off and to stay out of the way of business beyond my competence. While I was about this, Wire righted the machine which had bounced back several yards from the tree, tore off the shattered cowling and windshield, kicking at the hinge that held a large piece. The gas tank had split but with a cord from a sleeping bag which I hadn't realized was in the pack, Wire

tried to bind it tight enough to hold fuel for the duration of our return.

The repairs failed. Wire became incoherent and lost most of the fuel. I used the rest of it to create a blaze which at first was too large to be useful and then was quickly swallowed up by the snow beneath it. Bad mistakes. Wire came to his senses long enough to instruct me to stuff one sleeping bag inside the other, to set them on our clothes in a grave-shaped hole in the snow scraped clean to the ground, and to lay both of us down together in that bed, naked, our parkas thrown over our heads and upper bodies.

I did it. For a stupid minute I hoped I would die of embarrassment before he did of hypothermia. The full-length feel of Wire's clammy skin, his grasp, and the inhalation of his expired breath: all turned magically to comfort. It was mid-morning and we were both warm and wide awake when we heard our rescuers' snowmobiles along the trail. On early morning patrol a warden had stopped at Wire's landing because my car had partially blocked the road and the plough operator had stopped, gone and knocked on the trailer door, and radioed in. The warden arranged a search. So here they were, two wardens and two police officers, in time to get us home for lunch. Wire and I stood in our steaming hole, nude as winter birch ready for whipping.

At lunchtime Brick leaves the school through the cement block addition. This year, his last at St. Einbach

Collegiate Institute, it's the nearest door to the parking lot. He passes rows of pale blue lockers along the grade ten hallway where the cement blocks are painted a dull yellow. Grade ten students pull out lunches or books. Brick stops beside Fred, a student he hasn't met but whom he's been asking about because of his recent fame. Fred was making spectacular moves on the volley ball court along with many spectacular bumbles typical of an untrained natural rookie talent. And those who took subtler notice of star qualities had recently seen him speaking in coherent sentences through oversize lips that appeared stuck on slightly crooked.

You're Fred, aren't you? May I call you Xed? It was a slight revision: the FR, sixth and eighteenth letters, replaced by the twenty-fourth. He pronounces it zed. Xed doesn't comment on the logic in it but agrees right away. He's a bench star on the varsity volleyball team, a tall spiker, awkward until a volley ball enters his controlled air space. Brick didn't play or watch volleyball but he thought there must be wonderful proofs for geometry, physics and God available in the arc of the ball, the gathering opposition, the concentrating muscles. He imagined that God must be executing in Xed's body the brilliant moves, still sporadic, but which sometimes, more and more often at each practice, landed a point for the shirts or skins. He wouldn't mind helping Xed write it up for his first feature article.

The Sabre Truth had just gone to press that morning. It had been a hectic and late paste-up night for the staff but Brick can't relax. He needs a new science writer for the How's How page. In less than a month and with only one paper out so far two science writers have quit on him and a third's doing sports.

"You'll write science, Xed. But it can't be natural marvels or new inventions. I'll help you. We could start with a feature on volleyball and God. The perfect set as conversion experience." Brick projects his idea of a devoted writer onto Xed and Xed nods and smiles his approval and agrees right away to accept a ride to the A & W for lunch.

While Brick and Xed approach the doors three female students stand in the lobby hesitating to leave because the sidewalks are soup. CKRC's overheated morningman who secured his fame by marketing predictable weather and fear and was therefore not familiar with the possibility of thanks for breath or for any weather at all had used the word blizzard for the terrible conditions that placed four inches of wet snow on the earth. He's trying to sooth us into thinking this is as bad as it gets, thought Brick. He gets excited about snow and runs out of language for nuclear annihilation. A-bombs should make us happy about everything. I failed chemistry -- yeah, but you didn't blow your face off. My mother's dying of cancer -- yeah, but she's lucky she won't have to see you screaming and frying

fifty miles from ground zero.

Brick is interested in one of the three, June, the school paper's photographer, the one in sopping wet moccasins. In fact he's been out with her already if the invitation to a funeral counts. An early grade twelve dropout, in fact the first and sentimental favorite among this year's dropouts, who'd begun compensating for a growing list of failures by washing, polishing and parading his dad's Polaris Custom, failed to stop at a highway crossing and was slammed by a bus. A friend on the passenger side survived with minor injuries which was a miracle, everyone agreed. The biggest church in town filled up with students let out of school if they thought they should attend. Most had already made a pilgrimage in small groups or alone to the back of Endorf's Ford where the wreck had been towed, to smell that blood-in-the-car smell and look at the perfumed dice.

Brick sits beside his date in a side aisle pew. She wasn't going to go at the principal's initial offer but when the funeral turned into a mass movement and the school closed for it she found herself without the ready excuse of a dedicated 'A' student and reluctantly accepted Brick's renewed invitation. The congregation sits down for the third opening hymn and two bars into it he asks her: "How do you like it so far?"

"What? You mean . . ."

"Death. I was thinking about death just now."

"Oh yeah. Neat." June was not as yet tired of Brick's

insults and could respond in jest. He was unable, then, to stop them leaving his mouth.

Brick issues a general invitation to the three to join him and Xed for lunch at the drive-in, to celebrate the press run. There was only the A & W in town then. His rubber boots flaring, clips jangling, Xed slogs through and the girls leap from car track to car track across the thick sludge to the '64 blue sedan while Brick ponders strategy to get June into the front seat.

June says nothing and Brick says nothing directly to her. Filling the carcasm from the back seat: a giggle to piss him off, to overlook, to file for future vengeance. Brick assimilates those options even as the '64 Comet, pulling onto the highway from the A & W lot, jerks out of a skid on its own. But Brick cannot notice the kinetics of being driven. He wants to lie down. Sometimes he drives to the back of a gas station or the bowling alley and sleeps for an hour.

\EDN

Dear Edna,

May I write to you? It's been ages since I saw you. I've been busy, too, but some ideas, when they enter my head, still make me think of you. I might be coming around to your way of thinking, Edna: I have to admit now that I no longer believe in a perfect Jesus. In the man, the rabbi, the obstinate miracle worker, OK; even in Jesus as baby or

as God if you like; but not the perfect prairie bible school Jesus. In fact, I'm wondering how that idea was ever associated with him. Perfect is an absurd idea to apply to a person; unverifiable in the first place and repulsive besides. Maybe it was a good idea once: when theologues had heads full of Aristotle and liked to banish each other from the empire. Now the word either produces an image of intricate, natural snowflake symmetry, or a blank. Jesus is neither, I think. Maybe it always happens when gurus collect the allegiance of their groupies that good ideas turn into ultimate, essential, undeniable, great eye-wetting ideas. Does that make them, by definition, religious ideas? Then I no longer believe that Jesus is or was religious. I hear a chorus of angelic voices: Then you don't believe he's God! No? Must God suffer the insult of an idea that Jesus, himself, cannot tolerate? God, I think, is as human as the rest of us or he's no one. Corporate theology, Edna: God with our qualities. But, if God is different -- and I'd be the first to insist on some hefty differences here -- he/she probably has these qualities in a better or stronger or more efficient arrangement than us but still on a continuum with our own experience. That's why perfect, or imperfect for that matter, doesn't apply. No, from the perspective I'm promoting here a perfect person falls right over the edge of any human continuum I can imagine.

Now I've got a bigger problem, Edna. Where do you stick the people's Jesus, scrubbed and demythed? Is there a new

mythology for him? I was born into a round religious world with gravity. Projected missiles either orbited or returned, either did some good or did some damage. This world was a place to return to, to save, to welcome a savior home to. What happened?

In the current universe an idea or hope can just leave, forever. Fortunately others arrive -- from somewhere, out of the blue. Didn't that phrase used to mean surprising, alien cute and interesting? I try to imagine it's Jesus trying to get back. He's exhausted but having a successful business trip, just stopping by for a drink, a good night's sleep and a day off around the pool at the Sheraton, no longer reading newspapers, no longer pissed off . . . it's a trick, it's overly friendly, much too familiar, God's a vapour about to vaporize me. I feel like I'm on another of Columbus's ships trying to believe the captain's log that says we haven't gone too far; yet terrified of the horizon, the very last one. How long before I'm sucking on a plastic Jesus again? Are all the mythologies hollow and hostile now, Edna?

love,

BJ,

\LTR_2189.EDN

I lift my head from the keypad and rub the embossed pattern out of the skin on my cheek and chin. I'm just

preparing to clear the screen of a list of error messages when the door swings open behind me. An old dream is there to pick me up. It drove up in a brand-new '75 Tradesman 300 equipped with an electric platform lift at the cargo door, every handicap association's dream vehicle for serviceability.

The dream quite willingly threw me the keys when I suggested that I do the driving. I climbed into the driver's seat and, unfamiliar with the accelerator response, backed out of the driveway with a roar and clatter of stones. "Thanks," I said to the dream, and left it standing dumfounded in a cloud of gravel dust.

I stopped first at Xed's and showed him how to get into the cargo area. He secured his chair with the wheel locking hardware and we drove to the Annual All Volunteers Benefit Supper. Xed made his own way into the church while I parked. That year the church had installed a makeshift ramp for access into the lobby but there was no unspectacular way to wheel yourself down into the church hall. I dodged and greeted my way through the lobby just in time to see four men, three too many, easing Xed's wheelchair down the stairs and onto the basement floor. They managed it. Xed did a one-step thump down the stairs behind them: because he doesn't let people touch him, they compensate. One guy can handle a wheelchair, God knows, but neither God nor I, founder and past president, respectively, of the St. Einbach Handicap Association and among the day's special guests,

were in any position to instruct anyone here. A little boy's hand was accidentally stepped on.

Finally released from the sport jacket flapping, cologne-wafting spectacle, Xed parked at a freshly papered folding table near the stairs. "Join me here, Brick? There's no way I'm sitting up there." Xed gestured toward the head table on a dais, two steps up, no ramp, already occupied by several elders, church and town. I foolishly vacated my head table seat. "Nor will I make a speech up there. They can bloody well hand me the microphone," he added as I sat down.

Like God, I think Xed had already stopped forgiving kids for the sins of their parents. Benevolent mothers of my acquaintance, June among them, trotted their nippers, curly and straight, down the steps and past us to the soup and dessert tables. I listened nervously to the bright little mimics: "Fred is great in a wheelchair, mom, he can do tricks . . . it must be great fun, mom." "That's 'Wheels', mom. What's his real name, mom?" 'Wheels' was a formal tag just then. He'd been 'Coaster', 'Automatic', 'Wheelie-Fred', 'One Speed'; most consistently 'Spinner' to his basketball teammates. Renamed every other day it seemed.

The mothers, too: "Shush. That's no way to speak. This is Fred and Mr. James, dear. I'm sorry, is it 'Fred'? Dear, go find a table -- I'll bring you your soup." They were the volunteers for the March of Dimes, the SEHA,

Chamber of Commerce, and other community service organizations. But Xed wondered out loud, leaning over, "Voluntary mothers?"

For the first half hour I smiled at all the friendly patronizing remarks offered Xed. Helpful people brought soup buns cheese coffee and dessert. After my gracious words of introduction I went back to my seat for desert while the mayor introduced Xed and made a comment which turned into a speech.

I rotated pieces of rhubarb on my pie plate making patterns in the pale congealed sugar. I could walk. Sometimes I took the cane along for ice or used it when lazy around the house -- useful, too, for fast-tracking through bank and check-out queues. Whenever I was with Xed, though, I couldn't take my good fortune for granted.

Finally the dream I was waiting for came along and immediately reminded me how five years ago, against all odds and orders, temporarily free of casts between complications, I had danced at June Rempel's twentieth birthday. By then June had carved out a reputation in town a skip of a provincial championship rink, and for the care she volunteered at the Kinsmen Handicap Centre. A child had been there who imitated my clumsy shuffle, but not June's delicate trip over my braced limb.

June was sitting, or rather, sporadically sitting between her two sons. She jumped up and ran back and forth between them and the buffet. Had she looked my way during the

speeches? I'm sure she smiled. Her husband sat across from his little nuclear family in rapt hockey talk with a teammate sitting next to him, his head snapping around between replays to bench-coach the family feeding. At least he couldn't spit here. At least he didn't.

June's hair had been straight and short and nearly the same dusty brown as mine in high school. I'd even let mine grow long at the back like hers during my convalescence because I liked the way it caressed the base of her neck when she turned her head, or the way it fell over the collars of her white cowboy shirts. Here she wore it as a curly round ball along with a pant suit over a turtleneck sweater: all wrong. Finally she got her husband's arm to reach across the paper-covered table towards the kids; got his head to nod for a moment in her direction. She came over to say 'hi'.

In the space of the twenty steps it took her to reach us, I found my own way out of a personal tangle of trite resentments by following a vague path of old arguments back into our friendship. She married the centre because a girl gets married and has a family: status and security. She married for her parents' sake; not as was said, for the sake of the child. Specifically the centre? For the same reason they were quickly forgiven: both young, virile, large-boned, a beautiful couple; a marriage made, if not in the desired sequence, in heaven. She married for love. Of course the brute is handsome, physical, talented; no doubt all of his

nerve endings worked in sync with her nerve endings, the wiring for a happy love, why not. But if she loved the hunk why did she also love me? Or perhaps, how? 'Hello, super-mom' was on the tip of my tongue but I thought better.

"Hi, June."

"Hello, Brick, Hi, Fred. How are you guys?" Her voice stopped and started in lilting rushes that instantly soared above old resentments or motherly solicitude.

"Rehabolutely wonderful. You?" shot Xed.

"Hey, you're in a bit of a funk! What, enjoy His Worship's speech that much?"

"Yeah, the usual farce. A politician quoting Bible verses. All the more hilarious when he's also a businessman and a preacher; a veritable jack-in-the-box, that man. Just when he's about to put you to sleep -- zing -- out springs another joke."

June sat down in a chair across from us and laid her arms on the paper. She gestured with short articulate fingers. "Oh yeah, like how a camel gets through the eye of a needle! On its knees? And here I thought all along it was impossible -- for men, that is."

"Easier to get a wheelchair into a church basement, too, probably," I said.

She laughed quietly, trying not to attract attention. I placed a hand on the table and pointed to some doodling Xed had done between the crumbs and soup stains: several figures

in wheelchairs and a sci-fi background of lightning, smoke and the tops of temples. "I liked the bit about Ezekiel's wheels best," he explained.

I agreed: "Before O.W.'s sermon I never thought of life in a wheelchair as a glorious reflection of Ezekiel's apocalyptic wheels."

"Makes sense," said Xed. "It'll be great to see all us paraplegics leading the charge through the Pearly Gates now that they've budgeted for ramps, eh?"

June leaned over the table and twisted around to appreciate the art. "They won't let you in with a wheelchair, you know. It'll be 'good-bye' Wheels -- 'hello' Fred." She sat back. Her eyes were bright with the resurrection and she touched my hand above the socket of my middle finger. I said, "Did you hear we'll be losing our number one benefactor?"

"Old Wilf? No." One of her finger tips pushed harder into my skin, then her hand withdrew.

"Yup. Well, if he wins the riding. By last night the last challenger bowed out of the nomination race. So he'll be the PC candidate by acclamation and a shoo-in for election." I wanted the fingers back. "A shoo-in. I'll give you two-to-one odds, five bucks."

"Against a Liberal incumbent?" Xed interjected.

"Hm. Yeah, I think you're right. Bets off. What did you think about his 'rich in humility' stuff?"

I knew it was an absent-minded touch. It was my own

little game to animate those short talented fingers when they talked.

"I'm sure His Worship must be humbled every time he helps someone," replied Xed. "It's soooo humiliating. Damn, I wish more people were as honest! He should run seminars for the humble rich in Florida every winter."

June emitted a subdued shriek, not quiet enough. "Shush cynic," she whispered. Several heads turned including her husband's. His big arm waved her over and pointed at the boy with noodles sliding into his lap from a puddle on the table. "See you Wednesday, Fred. Oh no -- we're off to Disney World with the boys tomorrow. Can you imagine? The week after, then." She jumped effortlessly back into motherhood.

She might've been a good mother, I don't know. The dream left me struggling with a wish to forgive her. What for? Her kids, her absent-minded fingers, her ability to just up and leave, fly off to any old world? I wish I hadn't killed her. I wish I wished I'd killed myself instead.

"I'm dropping Xed off at school. Everyone else back there out too, eh. I've just got to go to the bank and then get June's advice on something at the printers. We'll probably be late." Here, as often happened in like situations, Brick sees and grabs an opportunity to impress his girl. In his head he tries to say "my girl" because he's been noticed with June: at the pub in Landmark when all the students who

worked on the first issue went drinking he felt people had given "them" a little respect, a little distance. But unsure of her, flustered by Teen Burger juice, lacking aplomb, he plays a fifth ace. As he rolls to a stop in front of the main doors he says in addition, "I can't provide lateness slips for anyone who's not on the payroll so to speak. Meaning: get out or risk a detention."

The three in the back seat leave willingly, enjoying the brutality. Brick's authority as senior editor of the student paper impresses them, actually charms them, along with the boil on the back of his neck which drew their attention all through lunch. They leave the car in good humour, in sympathy.

His fingers go around the skin eruption delicately as Brick waits for them, all conspirators against him, to climb out the school side of his blue Comet. June stays in the car and Brick takes her to the printers with no clear idea what to do there.

He walks her by the front desk and introduces her to the want ad editor whose first name he suddenly remembers, but he tries to avoid the office manager, Mr. Bill Schalla. Bill hated customers to ask about their print runs before they were due and the Sabre Truth was scheduled for two o'clock. It was printed and then delivered to the school's main lobby in time for distribution as students left, but only on Thursdays.

But Mr. Schalla spots him and walks over. He meets June

and compliments her on the photograph cropping. He doesn't suspect that she's a threat to Brick's ego and tells Brick that Mr. Moore hasn't called him back yet with the go-ahead. He thinks the Principal is having difficulty with Brick's editorial and he'll have to reschedule the run for next Thursday if he doesn't hear from Moore by one o'clock: twelve minutes.

Brick decides to project slow smoldering rage, to exhibit aplomb in crisis. He tears out of the building with June, drives fast and asks her while the car slithers whether she can meet him tonight. She says no, she has curling and is meeting her friends. He can find them at Pazzi's, probably, after ten, if he dares. If he dares? He's running a paper, fighting principals for free speech, and driving a '64 Comet through slush at high speeds! He double parks behind the Vice-Principal's Impala hardtop in the staff lot. They're not late so Brick loses the opportunity to sign a lateness slip for June but she probably noticed the secretary show him into Moore's office.

Moore asks him if he really wants his copy to read, "Jesus was a bullfrog when he walked upon the water."

The phrase goes by Brick's ears: he misses the error, gives Moore a smart answer, and falls into the trap.

"Yes," says Moore, "I know it's Leonard Cohen, but who is this Jesus? The bullfrog's supposed to be Jeremiah, isn't it? And Jesus a sailor, no? I think you can make your point, whatever it is, with Jeremiah." Moore tells him, as

if Brick cared, that the embarrassment won't get out of his office. Outsmarting students was an ancient strategy and Moore looks exceedingly pleased when he picks up the phone at ten past one and asks for Bill Schalla. He orders the change and authorizes on behalf of the Sabre Truth the cost of resetting some type and another print master. The paper will be delivered today: "Crisis avoided," Moore assures Brick. Brick nods, goes out to move his car, arrives late to class with a late slip from Moore himself, and the rest of the afternoon doodles through his classes in silent contemplation of another problem altogether: at what stage was the destruction and salvation of the world described in John's revelation at?

The world was getting ready for something: the hippies, the draft dodgers, last ditch bombing raids, the peace marches; all signs pointing to the end of materialism and militarism. Maybe his bible school teacher is wrong, maybe the world doesn't have to be totally destroyed to be saved. All a hippie needs is Jesus. Brick argues with the churches to accept the new freedom, to 'get back to the garden' which after all is their Genesis 1 and 2 garden. Then he argues with the hippies to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour; many already were. Brick thinks he doesn't need tie-dyed T-shirts, purple lenses or grass: Jesus out-hippies the hippies, he digs Jesus. God might use him to start something in the centre of the continent. Something big could be happening right here in St. Einbach. Maybe he and

a few friends should drop out of school, baptize each other and head up north to survive Armageddon: two cats in the vase.

At the four o'clock bell Brick avoids the main lobby, speaks to no one and goes for his car in the staff lot. The plough has piled slush around the Comet and he can't back out of his spot without shovelling the thick stuff out of the way. He takes out the shovel, works at the wet mass, and plays with the word 'obstacle' inside his mouth. It flops about on his tongue. On the first attempt the car backs right out. It's a fruity, frozen, eastern European word: ob-stickles, ob-stackles, obst-eccles. He and some of his friends had the habit of slowing down and contorting fascinating words. He sucks on this one for awhile, pacified.

Avoiding the after-school hangouts Brick goes straight home to place a call to Wire. Wire's phone in the bush is dead and when he calls Shirley she says, "Why not just go out there? I'm sure he's expecting you."

Shirley put some confidence in the arrangements Wire made with anyone other than her and the children. But that wasn't a lot of confidence either. Because he likes Shirley, Brick decides to whip out there and ask her to get through to Wire on the radio. If Wire was away, or knew the roads were bad, there was still the possibility of seeing June at the curling rink or later at Pazzi's. He places the

bank receipt on the kitchen table and turns the stoker up for his mom on his way out of the trailer.

Slush and french fries fly from the car as Brick goes through the four-door sedan with the whisk. Then he gets in and takes the highway around the outskirts of town and on to Townline Road. The car's running not badly for a '64. Car ownership in high school is a big plus for Brick's life and for the plan he has. He thinks of it as a single spatial plan that could be pasted on paste-up paper. The main items are the Sabre Truth, the Comet, his application to the U of A, his girl, and, ghosted over these graphics, his brother Wire, and Jesus. Driving the flat, symmetrical, predictable grid of sectional roads beyond the town limits gives him the spatial metaphor he needs. He can both see and feel, sitting behind the wheel on those prairie roads, the perfect angular shape of the world's salvation, its organization suddenly clear and possible. He drives three miles and wonders whether he's passed the four-mile corner to Wire and Shirley's place. Suddenly confused he falls into that navigational stupor, that synthetic lostness of prairie drivers: sure of their destination; not knowing where they are.

\EDN

Dear Edna,

You suggested that unidentified ideas, the kind that fit nowhere, create silence, embarrass, choke off laughter,

call from too far away . . . these thoughts, you said, are the most valuable. Did you also mention, or I dream it, that I could place them in letters to you. But maybe you don't even remember the suggestion passing from you to me in the first place because you were across the room, drunk, and talking loudly to Sheilagh.

As I write to you, Edna, just now, I am aware that my 'now' is already several days or minutes past. But however long ago I wrote this, what you are reading now is in my future, but will of course be present to you. Space is an equivalent factor here. Were we directly linked and I sending these words directly to your screen, real time, rather than wait for them to appear in a letter, book, or other memory, it would make no difference. My words line up my chips as I type and then my chips inflict their lineage on your chips. It's still a translation, a new generation, a video display, the appearance of words in front of our eyes. Four eyes, two time zones. Time is a word, space is a word. My 'now' is already way back when. And where the hell is your 'now' now, Edna? Future to me; already past to you?

Something's wrong with our space/time conventions, Edna. Useful as they are for grammar, daily bread, and the social niceties we've come to expect, when applied to a dynamically communal item like meaning, to an understanding of what's going on when we read, I think they fall apart. Don't we need a liquid hermeneutic that's as fluid as writing?

Physicists already know that a Newtonian universe is only a convenience but I suspect the majority of us will have to plod along in it for some time yet. What I'm hoping is that with a small shift in consciousness, we'll at least let visible words go to work for us: both reader and writer. Isn't it the appearance of language on stones, skins, parchments, VDTs that has produced the seduction we've traditionally labelled truth, wisdom, or law?

Suppose, Edna, that you and me establish a link between our two computers that allows for simultaneous editing of one document. I might be merrily rearranging paragraphs and font styles; you could be adding interesting stuff somewhere else and suddenly see a style change come over your work. Maybe fights would occur as we undid each other's stuff or as contradictions appeared in the text. Then suppose the thing were set up as a multi-line bulletin board and anyone anytime could contribute to one fast growing, interactive, massive novel. What if every writer in the world were brought online, that there in fact existed only one text in the whole world: one multilingual, megaphonic, omnistyled novel with some kind of seething dynamic index growing even faster. And, Edna, why limit ourselves to the concept of 'novel'? Why not include every category of writing? People who want to distinguish between fact and fiction, propagandist and indicative, reportage and imagination, this and that, can configure their select criteria to find out what's happening to whom, where, when, etc. in just the way

they'd like to see it; ie., make it look like mathematics, social psychology, their favorite comic strip, whatever. Anyway, you could search out a specific place to start or just randomly select something to edit or add to, then jump in and write your bit into the work. It wouldn't even be a question of what part of the novel you were working on because each participant, according to their own search criteria and the constantly evolving index, will be reading a different collection of work. You couldn't even read the same thing twice unless you intentionally interrupted the process. Of course you'll want to capture parts of it, perhaps even print out some of it for a seminar, for teaching purposes, or as tabloid pulp for popular entertainment. Think how easy it'll be for editors to excerpt new copy from the manuscript every day and so replace the jaundiced war monopolies now printing newspapers. For the foreseeable future writers will depend somewhat on hard copy to market and get paid for their work, but I suspect people who insist on printing, on actually publishing books and distributing them as definitive of some knowledge or art or social arrangement, will soon be considered very uncool, very canon, canonites.

\LTR_3189.EDN incomplete

Our chairman, F.F. Plett, shifted his weight on the metal folding chair. A plastic foot was missing from it and there was a screech that echoed irritably around the bare cement

of the church basement's floor and walls. I was about to record this screech into my rough draft of the minutes, one of my small amusements as secretary for the committee, when F.F. brought another matter forward for our discussion which resulted in his death.

"What are we going to do with Wendel James?"

"So F.F.'s going to go through with it, then," I thought. In fact that's what each of us was probably thinking, but I had the last part of a sliver in my palm just about to come out and didn't want to break my concentration, so I said nothing. Instead I glanced all around the table and up at the ceiling, moving my eyes enough to clue in the ever-alert F.F. that he could table this item and bring the meeting to a close any time as far as I was concerned.

I should introduce you to everyone around the table. This table is a sheet of plywood with the metal hardware, the folding legs kit. You get them unfinished and save substantially. Someone handy can -- oh, I admit to being the handyman: in this case I replaced all the straight slotted screws with Robertsons. My name's Brick, by the way, acting secretary-treasurer.

This is F.F., our chairman. He's been chairman as long as I can remember, going back ten or twelve years anyway.

Then around that way is Mütlich (Helmut) Froese. He's very steady: our Sunday School Superintendent and a high school teacher. He's also on the executive with F.F., and Ben W.

Ben W., there, is vice chairman. Smooth Ben W. married a distant cousin and moved soon after to the Wisconsin Dells. He ran an evangelical zoo and campground connected to some property of his bride's uncle. She joined Jim Hansen's Water Ski Show where she quickly worked her way up to top girl. She had known Jim only as the older brother of the pimply Bob Hansen who had been a high school sweetheart of several of the girls there in Wisconsin, growing up. They've been back for a couple of years.

I'm the new arrival on the committee having only established my membership as of the last fishing trip. I might replace my brother, Wire, and then they'll probably give the job of secretary-treasurer to me and I'll be on the executive officially. The current executive must have met earlier, before Rudy and I arrived, and decided to bring up the matter to drop Wire. Well, understandably. Wire hasn't shown up for six years. Oh yeah, and that's Rudy. Rudy came on about the same time as Wire, I guess. Finally I wrote into my minutes:

what to do with Wendel James -- F.F.

Ben W. never cleared his throat when he began to speak and never laughed or slapped his knee when he finished. Very odd. Instead, firm baritone sounds slid out of him into the situation and disappeared. Gone. He said, "Might we have the minutes from the meeting of Wendel James's last appearance with this committee?" That was a shocker. So they really did want to go through with it.

I obliged but grudgingly, paging back to the place, easily identifiable by Wire's entries in red ink. F.F. didn't know about the red-letter version, and I was sure, didn't want to know. But he said again, "Let's have the minutes from Wendel's last meeting."

That phrase, 'Wendel's last meeting', was a signal of some historical importance to this committee. In the collective imagination Wire lurked in the bushes. They felt he bore a continual grudge against F.F., as if waiting, just waiting his chance. They seemed to need Wire for this purpose but now wanted to put an official end to his member status: a big mistake.

Wire had used red ink for F.F. and black for everything else in his version of the minutes until he stopped coming to committee meetings six years ago. "When I was a boy," he explained, "I received a red-letter New Testament. You know the one that highlights all the words of Jesus in red? This helped me speed up my morning devotions considerably because I could just ignore the clutter and apply the Lord's word directly. Also, red wouldn't copy on the Sunday School's old copier, remember? When I became a teacher, later, I could copy a page for each student and have them fill in the blanks as if they were the Lord Jesus themselves. A real lesson that was! Nobody knew how hard it was to try and be the Lord, yourself. The first time I picked up a copy out of the copier and saw the words of Christ missing, let me tell you, that was a mystical

experience. God, I imagined, had taken his words right off the page and demanded a rewrite. Well, we gave it a try!"

To that committee meeting six years back, Wire's last as secretary-treasurer, I had tagged along, uninvited but tolerated by F.F. Towards the end of the hour which, if there weren't sufficient business was filled with Bible study and prayer, Ben W. was in the midst of a golden-tongued oration and Rudy was, judging by his expression, nursing fantasies. What these were about can only be guessed at, but Wire, musing through Ben W.'s oration in black ink, suddenly switched to red and winked at Rudy. There was an element of grimace in the crude smile Rudy returned, as if he held the entire weight of the table up on his thumbs. Also, he tried to return a wink. The failure of this caught Wire's notice and he attempted his own grimace for Rudy all the while recording the exchange in red ink.

Rudy (grimace): has Millie standing up in Ben W.'s house, in the hallway door to the kid's bedroom. There's the smell of everything cleaned up, a lot of mess cleaned up, dr., and powdery.

Wendel (wink): has a little gratuitous tussle with Millie in the back of Ben W.'s Valiant, the three on their way to visit the Pletts on a Sunday afternoon.

Rudy (attempted wink): has her bent over a rail, from the back.

Wendel (smile): finds her on a lazy Caribbean beach, just happy to please him with her mouth and fingers.

So much was understood by means of these facial gestures that Millie's body appeared, splayed out and asleep, on the table between them. Mütlich was aghast but Ben W., though looking, let it pass unnoticed for some time as he talked. Wire and Rudy were both rather embarrassed to see Millie materialized on the table.

F.F. was livid, red. Never before had a woman appeared before this committee. Imperceptibly Ben W.'s voice changed and the words that emerged were something like, "In light of this situation, I move we adjourn." So he did notice his Millie. And then he was offended, actually angry. He took Millie away immediately and moved to Wisconsin. That was when they moved there to manage that zoo and to water ski respectively.

And even after the family moved back again, Millie continued to generate fantasies like a walking industry dedicated to their manufacture. Or did she? These things are manufactured in the minds of others without one's active participation, as you know. We should see her, for instance, in her housecoat, crouched beside a wet dollop of hairball and stewy Meow Mix on the floor of the kids room, wiping it up with not quite enough paper toweling, getting her fingers wet a little. This doesn't bother her. She thinks about what to serve with the casserole in the oven

for her family's supper and after supper, if the car will start, she'll pick up some salad fixings and fruit and go and see if Helen Froese, Rudy's mother, is up to a game of scrabble.

We should know, too, that she and Ben W. drive to Wisconsin every year for their summer holiday where they stay with her people, sometimes this one, sometimes that, whoever it suits. She has about two hundred and fifty dollars a year for clothes, buys stockings maybe once a year, one pair of shoes, patterns and material. She looks nice. So it's Rudy and Wire who have a problem. At least they did until Millie showed up on the table. Suddenly it was a committee problem and some kind of decision was wanting.

As you can see, F.F. misinterpreted the whole business. True, Millie was sticky on her hands and there were semen beads and strings glistening on her pubic hair, but the issue for F.F. wasn't whose seed it was or why it was splashed there. In F.F.'s mind this condition of Millie's was fine for a woman: lying comfortably asleep, sticky with sex, prototypical. If you speeded up the camera for nine months and had Millie appear before F.F. in successive guises; dressed for housework, dressed for shopping and tea, for going to a hockey game at the arena to sit elbow to elbow among the drink sloshing, mustard flinging crowd; spilling and screaming in mad rages at the ref herself, and finally returned her to the table in the throes of having

another kid, none of this would have altered F.F.'s perception of the outrage. As we noted, it was the shock of a woman appearing for the first time before this committee that upset him.

A consistent man in many ways, F.F. was willing to let the inevitable go by without getting carried away. In the situation here with Millie he was in the same position as we are, without an adequate explanation as to how she had appeared. A lesser man would have been astonished by the supernatural features of the apparition. He might have exploited the event to get a church built over the site, or, in this case, where a well-built church already existed (the only pressing problem now with it being that the Fire Marshal wants to see a two-hour door on the furnace room - - the asbestos lining is up already -- and at least a one-hour ceiling for the basement. Well, we also want to insulate and partition a part of the basement for classrooms and library; there's always something), a slick operator could establish a shrine on the strength of Millie's visitation, one should think.

This is what I mean. This kind of thing went right past F.F. He could zero in on the substantial, weigh all the consequences, foresee the practical implications for the life of the congregation, the committee structure, the fishing trips, the body as a whole. If he cannot right away handle the emotional response, this does not detract from the validity of his views. Later, however, this weakness

would kill him.

But in this situation F.F.'s emotional reaction happened to suit his plan perfectly. Millie was got out of town and Wire was embarrassed into leaving the committee, fishing and all, because F.F. could deftly stick the knife and turn it when in small public gatherings of two or three. So, he got what he wanted, as usual, and Wire was voted off the committee as somehow responsible for the Millie fiasco, for his own good.

Rudy was the more innocent party. He lived a bachelor's existence in his own apartment. The building wasn't much to look at; old, but not interesting. Millie could have easily entered that building unnoticed at the back. It shared a parking lot, sort of (there were always squabbles on shopping nights), with the shopping district -- back to back -- and it was not well lit. So, ostensibly shopping, she could sneak up to his apartment and have a go with Rudy. That may be why she visits Mrs. Froese and plays a game of scrabble with her once in a while. For every three visits, say, to Roger's apartment, she could make one over to his mom's. Millie knows how to keep up appearances. No one ever said she wasn't talented.

F.F. said, "We'll hear Wire's minutes now," because I'd been stalling. I wrote:

motion to read the minutes of January 4, 1976 -- Ben W.

seconded -- F.F.

carried -- 4/1

(I threw in that gratuitous vote on Wire's behalf)

Then I read, "F.F. prayed: . . . ," but I paused and said, "Do you wish to have your prayer read?" I suspected maybe not since we pray extemporaneous, rambling prayers and to repeat them is annoying to God, who, in the words of Jesus, said, "Be not as the heathen who think that by repetition and much speaking they can please God." They can't. But F.F. said he'd have the prayer.

I tried another out. "Are we praying, then, now? Or what? How can I say this prayer sincerely as a minute? I can't really read it and pray at the same . . ."

"Give me that. I'll read. You pray. Everything's sacrilegious to you, Brick! F.F. took the book before I could say, "That's okay, I'm being silly -- here goes." So F.F. finally learned of the red-letter edition of the minutes. Every word attributed to him, six years prior, flared out at him and scorched his visage. Wire was winning round extemporaneously. I was pleased that I had voted for him and found myself taking credit for setting F.F. up to take a little fall just as Wire would have wished in order to counter this grudge against him which the committee nurtured.

Since it's easier for eyes to go blurry over red script than black, I'm betting that F.F.'s vision was flowing with that ink of Wire's. F.F. paged back awhile only to confirm his misery. He was not good with embarrassment.

Suddenly I was enjoying this. I retook the minute book

from his vibrating fingers. It slid away wet from the cold upward facing palms. Even before I began the first verse of the prayer F.F.'s hands were clenching and unclenching; synchronized with deep breaths.

The red letters came into focus for me and in spite of F.F.'s condition, and to please a notion I myself had of Wire's vengeance, I prayed the iambic tetrameter to the rhythm of F.F.'s hands. All eyes closed (F.F.'s tighter than the rest):

Dear Lord we pray your guns to keep
Loaded and ready while we sleep,
We will all arrangements make
If you should die before we wake.

-- Amen," I added quickly, sensing trouble. There were three verses but I cut it there.

F.F. was offended beyond speaking. His attack came on. His eyes opened wide in pain (frightening). Everyone continued praying privately, Mütlich launching a subdued mumbling in tongues. Later he claimed his glossolalia to be an interpretation of F.F.'s original prayer, not the spurious one he thought for several days I had made up. But there it was in red. And cver there, F.F., praying no more but staring, collapsed drooling on the floor, and rapidly changing from red to yellow to blue, actually green.

Ben W. said, "The soul of the man rose up through the exhaust vent above the stoves in the kitchen (from where we were meeting around the folding table the kitchen was in

plain sight at the far end of the church basement, separated from us only by the serving counter. The panels we had long hoped to install to close off the kitchen from the floor hockey, or just to give the ladies a little privacy from all the roughhousing, hadn't been gotten around to yet)." No one bothered to try, then, though everyone was probably thinking vague thoughts of CPR, to resuscitate the corpse.

I could accept that and quickly took the opportunity to release that sliver while turning back to the minutes of that day and finish my entries.

minutes of January 4, 1976 -- read

question of Wire -- tabled

motion to adjourn -- Brick

seconded -- Rudy

carried 4/0, one abstention

Mütlich and Ben W. moved across the smooth floor together, towards the phone by the kitchen. The floor of the church basement, although it almost looked like a cement surface, was painted with a grey filler/primer recommended if kids are going to be playing floor games because you don't chew holes in your socks as fast as bare concrete. You can put a gloss or semi-gloss finish on top of that yet but its quite expensive when you think of a floor that size. The basement had unfinished cement walls, fixed 14" window units installed high along both sides, exposed joists and steel expansion posts in two rows at twelve foot intervals. This was all according to the building code in effect at the time

of construction. If I take a second to do the calculations, the basement and the church above it with its white clapboard exterior and the colourless marbled type glass that lets in the light but can't be seen through, had a width somewhere between 28' and 38' considering two rows of posts. As to length there were eight posts, again at 12' intervals. The less posts the better, as you know, for sock-destroying floor hockey. It was a game F.F. loved but now the man, a family man; company, church, and amateur hockey man; kind, stupid, and faithful to a series of wives, was dead.

Rudy came running up to Mütlich and Ben W. on their way to the phone just as Ben W. was about to say something. He slowed himself up by grabbing a post and, interrupting Ben W., he said hurriedly, high pitched, "We could bring Wire back on the committee now!"

In the short space the men covered between there and the phone it was agreed. Mütlich nodded his head and shoulders together and Ben W. sucked in a little air of affirmation, barely audible, but as good as swearing on the Bible which he had never done. At the phone Rudy put in a call to Wire to get him back on the committee as chairman and then let Ben W. take the other arrangements in hand concerning F.F.

In this way Wire came back on the committee following F.F.'s demise. He assumed the chair and cautioned me to use only black ink except for deficits in the ledger. The committee never met again. As it was, Wire could make

adequate reports to the Annual without the bother of meeting. He had the ability to do it; to imagine his own minutes, even to go to his own church.

\LTR_3189.EDN continued

Sorry, Edna. I was called away suddenly. I think I'll revise my hasty suggestion that the canon is dead. I hear you saying, "What of The Bible, The Tales of Genji, The Whole Earth Catalogue? OK, OK. Of course a healthy interest should be maintained in the most influential texts. In fact nothing need be lost, the index can keep everything perpetually and accommodate historicized searches: Hammurabi's Code, Salome's wish list, the UN's charter of human rights, the Grateful Dead Songbook, all can be preserved, referred to, made as much of in current discussions and text production as continuing textwork can bear. So, OK, lets admit the inevitable canonization process. Are we back where we started I guess, eh Edna? Those who control the index will control information, as always. I just thought that the awful magnitude of an instantly available text combined with everyone's innate hacker's curiosity might make a critical difference, encourage difference, encourage chaos . . . but it has to, Edna! Look what a marvelous weapon poisonous gas has been since WWI: small doses filling a discreet selection of lungs; but now we've intoxicated everyone who breathes the earth's atmosphere. Bombs are nice for terrorists in

toilets and baggage compartments; but God's government has already blown up more at one blow than is imaginable and the earth looks small through that eye now, Edna. Yeah so you're right, the world's mythologies, as ancient as you like, have always included whole earth disasters in their recommendations for our stupid evil species: floods, fires, plagues; but the difference is, isn't it, that nobody's God is destroying us now. We've finally outperformed the mythologies, Edna, all by our own stupid evil selves. We're not little; we're big. Big enough to know better and do better and so, yeah, if we replace the gospels' rooftop shouters with satellite preachers then we are talking about a different sphere of operations. Sorry, I don't mean a few imperialist nut cases who set themselves up as God's voice. The charm of ancient communications (Roman roads, plaza balconies, minarets and rooftops) was their local imprecision. A heavy political message only travelled as fast as a huge sluggish army over the mountain pass: what happened when it arrived must have been very old news already. If you filled the evening village air with worldwide rumors and local gossip, forty versions per forty neighbourhoods multiplied by all the neighbourhoods on earth, then you get something resembling the massive, chaotic system I'm suggesting we set up with our interactive digital text. Then if the town is vaporized at least we'll know it was someone's little moment of insanity. Don't you feel better: smug as a bug in a program? The new snobbery

will be to say nothing in a meeting or seminar that could possibly be understood. "You should have heard Ed at the coffee break! Talktalktalk and absolutely nothing made any sense. Not to me. You neither? He'll be management one of these days, mark my word!"

Serious new paragraph, Edna. What our text should accomplish is a new respect for words. Conscious of the cataclysmic deluge of words in the data base which no dam, border or binding could possibly hold, any specific words on a page or screen will both present and represent the appearance of those words to a reader. Only then, for convenience, collections of words will also be known as laws, poems, scriptures, letters of resignation, etc. But first they'll be known as words. Those that are good, that move between us, will be good because they participate in the creation of an agreement that did not a moment ago exist but exists now, a moment later, by their labour.

We might finally realize that not every word that stumbles into script has to be sacred or profane, true or false. Why not working class, for instance? Or a flux (Zeno, Heraclitus)? A rebirth (John's Jesus)? An agenda (Luke's Jesus)? A 16th century pamphlet (T. Muntzer)? Or a (dog-eared) novel that creates a special need for a word like fiction to distinguish one life form from another, realist from real, the representation from the presentation of a life, and finally, a text (looking at you now)? No, finally a trumpet blast. No, a twinkling of an eye. Maybe every

word we speak creates a new world, Edna. And they're accumulating, none discarded. Uncontrollable preservation.

To the ad campaign! First the slogan. Let me see, the most we can likely expect from the digital revolution, Edna, might be: "fish and chips for everyone." What could be more beautiful than the fractal chaos of fish multiplying exponentially among a hillful of eaters? At the very least we should see more guns pointed in many more directions with a better chance of getting hit accidentally or not at all. "Give me chaos or give me death!"

What I'm thinking, Edna, is that the end of the world is OK, even safe for kids. It should of course be locked and labelled: this file can be read or printed only; nothing can be added or deleted. Death is a special case, I think, and could have its canons and castles to keep peddlers and meddlers out. Then it might be expected without fear, waited for, and especially told as stories designed for those personal epiphanic moments when trumpets ought to blow. You know, for death and the dead, funeral processions, the passing of kings. Once the military paraders get a monopoly on the end (Salvation's blood and fire Army excepted) we're all dead.

love,

BJ

\LTR_3189.EDN

The ploughs had made a mess of the four-mile intersection.

Brick slows, manoeuvres through, and turns east towards Wire and Shirley's. The first sections right and left are cultivated. The fourth and fifth are bush, both sides. Brick feels the wrap of sticks around him as the Comet dips and lifts into the gravel-ridged muskeg. He turns into Wire and Shirley's driveway after the last intersecting section road, just where the road begins to wind its solitary way east into the tamarack, spruce and red pine beginnings of the true North.

\Uncle Gord revisited [I went to Thunder Bay several times to see him because he didn't come around anymore. Also, his family was embarrassed and worried because rumors concerning his mental health were reaching them. He was getting professional help -- I thought holding his own.]

Uncle Gord wrote lectures at his desk in the study. He had a penthouse apartment in one of the highrises south of the university. On one side he had a great view of it: Lakehead University. He could also see, from the balcony, or by poking his head through the 'cheap goddam awful' french door -- I told him what you do to keep it from jamming and how to waterproof it -- the white sails on Thunder Bay, and beyond the breakwater, asleep on the fitful silver of Lake Superior, a giant. He often expressed faith in granite.

With the money from feasibility studies Uncle Gord dressed swanky. He studied nuclear dump sites in committee. He

committeed with experts, walked with them over clean portions of the continent and sometimes sat briefly in discussions of shelf life. Then he laid down stable, scent-free metaphors for crust, always clean and cold and hard and suitable for sales. Meanwhile, the fumes of his nation's identity were finding their osmotic way around inside his head and seeping into his mythologies of ice and stone. But, so far, in the Environment Ministry's phrase, 'successfully passed through committee,' Uncle Gord was the enema, the 'Let's go!' guy, a laxative in the CanDo lexicon, supposed CEO of LexiCan Inc. These were key jobs for uncle Gord although he was an associate professor of History and lectured on the topic of Canada.

Yet Uncle Gord fancied himself a stumbling block in the path of academic pretension, a path he knew so well that he could afford to play iconoclast in the service of the status quo. Indeed, fashion dictated such a role and he wore its costume comfortably, as innocently as his country donned a mantle of virgin snow over her shield of glacier-scraped stone.

Since his appointment it was Uncle Gord's practice to write out new lectures for Can Id 603. Only several were needed to give the graduate seminar a certain direction. He had lain in bed until ten watching the familiar language of his subject migrate by him, wondering what he should capture for the introductory lecture at two o'clock. He thought he should present a rough granite ridge on which

unimaginative students could fall and get cut up a bit. It was his duty to them; to see them stumble, scabble up, bruise new muscles. He knew, if they were going to teach, they had to be toughened for academic warfare. He sat in the castored swivel chair and pulled a fresh legal pad out of a drawer.

Uncle Gord's trouble with words began last year about this time. His preparation then for the seminar had flown off on some crazy angles and he had thrown those lectures out. He hadn't published in eighteen months and his lecture in the department series had been little more than public relations for a point of view he should have canned long ago.

In undergrad courses Uncle Gord felt free to soliloquize from random notes. There he could reach for his country's clichés from within a pocketful of coins and toss them to his students, usually Canadian, forged into predictable denominations. But for his master students Uncle Gord still wanted a more exacting currency.

His postgraduates, staring into the liquid magnetic currents, watching the misty white face that appeared and disappeared on the surface of the coffee in their styrofoam cups, should see that the Shield is thick, long-hardened, and locked in position. It was drifting ambiguities that required the greatest discipline from a teacher: to harness and guide his mushers through them; and the subtlest skills: to effect the executive smile in banks, the fart of

excellence after a business lunch, the feel of funding. But Uncle Gord was just beginning to know that he was not a teacher.

He was once the summer camp counsellor assigned to Brick's cabin and one long summer evening he led his campers, nine nine-year-old boys, on a hike from their warm piss-surrounded cabin to a nearby lake for an overnight campout. Just packing took a long time and the carton of one dozen eggs he stuffed into the Ukrainian Orthodox boy's bedroll were all broken when they arrived at the campsite sometime after midnight. He guided the campers along several ridges and, just before sunset, into a swamp. The trek was slowed because he got them lost. Staying on the ridge they were on would take them so far off the required compass heading as to make it desirable to descend into the muskeg and slog across to the next, inevitably correct, ridge they had somehow missed. How those glaciers could corner! Down they dipped and the darkness that was falling fell. In muskeg tamaracks gather some land about their roots which can sustain the weight of a boy, but more often than not the foot misses or slips off and sinks knee deep. They could read the compass for only so long by dimming flashlight so they cross-referenced moonlight to the compass bearing and switched off to save batteries. The boys could not even see the shirt tails they grasped while slogging through that water. So a line of boys mudslurped along below blotted moonlight and somewhere in there the eggs

broke. Two of the boys lost sneakers, one both: two red sneakers and one white. But the bite of bogmen couldn't hold those guys' feet down. Those biting skulls, normally fed on boy's brains, had to settle for shoes that night because Uncle Gord absorbed all the boys' terrors and kept moving, in silence, admitting nothing.

The boys suggested that he spare the flashlights, mentioned that the moon was over there, asked to hold hands through the knee-deep mossy pits between the tamaracks. Thus Uncle Gord led them out triumphantly to the lake, a fine campsite, fire. He built a lean-to for himself with branches that leaked woodticks, mosquitoes and moorlight: a model for the self-sufficient. No one slept. Through the warm night they swam or sat in smoke until dawn when it was suddenly possible to breathe again, to spit out the mosquito paste, to pick off the last ticks and suckers.

The boys were boys and Uncle Gord, surprising no one, led them. Led them through eggless pancakes, along shorelines, towards the yellow sun. He explored the land of their new birth with them, crouched them down in a thicket to watch two natives go by in an stern-mount canoe. "Natives . . . sssh!" But the person in back suddenly cut the motor and crunched the boat onto the rock in front of them. Uncle Gord and the boys watched the couple mutter and laugh, heat something on a Coleman, and make love on a caribou skin in the smooth hollow of the rock. The rock gently rolled beneath them making it difficult for leader and boys to keep

still, to remain undiscovered.

Lapped by bright noon-time waves the canoe scraped, the shadowy thicket twitched, and the light behind the dark bodies jumped around on the edges of Uncle Gord's retinas. The boys were all eyes for the unexpected -- her clothes bunched up around her waist, his around his feet -- and the vaguely familiar rhythm of bodies. Their curiosity was aroused but Uncle Gord led them from there, taught them embarrassment, covered his ass with their sniggers, presented nine sniggering boys to smiling parents.

By the time he had a space cleared for the legal note pad the Laurentian Shield had already crumbled and slipped between his fingers. The beaver, skinned and mounted, had disintegrated from neglect. Nickel had melted into the image of Her Majesty's flip side. Thus Uncle Gord felt the skills of rational criticism abandoning him. Always aware of his historical sins Uncle Gord nevertheless mined claims that went deeper and further afield for guidance, found himself exchanging analogies for metaphors, allusions for pure fancies. 'Make history' he counselled, but Uncle Gord was stirring up myths.

Uncle Gord wrote, 'National Identity: Looking North and South.' Already banal, he thought, and suddenly resented that his country's history could never escape its geographical layout. Why did ice and igneous rock drift into every discussion? What Uncle Gord wanted was a truly northern perspective of Canada situated among her polar

neighbours. We should get people to see beyond the pole. He realized that this image immediately flew off into the deep space of solar winds and crystalline lights. He would avoid the mystical trap. Exposing a new page, he wrote:

Canada: South of the Pole

"from sea to shining border patrol pistols"

Sing: Our North is true, strong and free. Well, true if you live on the isogonic line of zero declension -- Red Lake, perhaps. Follow that squiggly line north and over the pole and there you are, Siberia: cold, industrious, Russian exiles -- we keep ours downtown. You get there if you just keep moving: walk, sled, jump from floe to floe.

You can make it on fresh mammoth, previous explorer meat, chop his cache of tea out of the ice, add rum to his soup, fish out his eyes. Hell, you don't have to ski, simply fly over, shake hands, hug, and be home for a proper lunch. Two poles, one magnetic, the other true and imagined, could make better neighbours than a fence between friends.

But elsewhere the pointer will not be true. To correct for it, remember: 'east is least -- west is best.' Even in the South you can be off by up to twenty-five degrees. Still, there's a magnetic sense of place here. You don't need a map to know that you're lying perfectly still between the cool cotton sheets of Carolina mills and Scandinavian eiderdown, the thermostat set at forty below to be sure the

heat doesn't come on till morning.

So you wish to visit the cousins in Canada? I suggest a trade mission. Combine business with pleasure. You see how we point the boy north, promise him gold, set up a joint with a stove and a pail of lard on Knee Lake, a mine and a store on God's. 'Survival,' you say? We say 'Pity.' We export pity. Our GNP and balance of payments depend on it. We'll trade pity for tea, for prime time, and beaver jokes anytime. It's the way we laugh, nervously, that ingratiates us. You can smell a bargain, after all. Just set a fibre-filled mummy bag down anywhere in Canada and a giggling bargain will crawl into it. Pounce, you have it. Only let us know you are pitiful in some way when you think of us.

Oh no, no, no, no. The pity is all for you. Us? We are survivors, not to be pitied. We asked for this, we want it this way. We cut up and share. Vast resources are yours for the asking if only you will say how fortunate we are, surviving in a place like this. We love it. It's a great place. No, please, pity yourself. You might be the absentee landlord of a chunk as big as Rhode Island, it's OK. We pay our rent. Only we'd like to hear from you. We understand you're busy playing gunboats somewhere over the drain hole. You hardly ever come up. We know the protocol, we behave: advanced warning, site see, sub seek in the arctic sewer and all that. But send us a card from your deck. You're not missing us, are you? Say you like Canadians on your next cruise.

We'll give you anything. Just say what a fine piece of ass this is. Say, "Why, I was goose hunting up there just last week."

"Great country. Big country. Big guys in boots and shirts."

"Girls in boots and shirts."

Uncle Gord thought he needed a break and got up to plug in the kettle. Finding himself out of tea-bags he pulled a jar of instant coffee out of the cupboard and, with some disgust, spooned some into the mug on the counter in front of him. An idea hit him and he rushed back to his desk. He wrote:

Ours is a land of lists. This is not new. Hammurabi listed his morals on one side of his tablet, achievements on the other. The Bible lists genealogies, commandments, sins of neighbours, sins of the heart, ways of a woman; Hammurabi's lists embellished by Moses, Roman lists embellished by Paul. Ours, too, is a list of goods. Canada began, officially, as a shipper's waybill:

30 t. beaver pelts, less beaver.

20 t. campfire ash, less forest.

50 t. cod, whole.

1,000,000,000,000 t. shit, less buffalo -- back ordered. The shopping list of your average European court. We can't get up in the morning now without an order to fill. Our history demands it. Our literature must conform. If it can't fit on the back of an envelope forget it.

The list as historical paradigm, political imperative, ecclesiastical agenda, is particularly suited to the Canadian heritage. We're seldom lost, we follow our calculators out of the bush. We are nothing if not shiny-eyed accountants going for Mom's bread, Uncle's newsprint.

At this point Uncle Gord trashed the notes. He checked the time on the way to the kitchen: one last chance for his lecture. Hauling the cup of coffee back to his desk he turned his attention to the scraps of mercy in his 'Oral History' file. There was an entire book in those scraps. But the pad of paper maintained its blank look. He could not write it.

Uncle Gord had another trick to break the runners; there was still the appeal to anecdotal history. He reached for his micro-cassette recorder. The electronic feel of switches, tape and batteries could restore order. He spoke into the machine:

Wilf, hired gun, cafe preacher, and one-time manager of the carwash: "C'mon, this is a growing town, Dick! I could run three, four more bays Saturday Sunday and have you paid off in two years. I owe it to my customers, Dick!"

Wilf truly thinks the old days were better: "Used to like the car wash business." As a cruising boy he'd made quarters out of pennies with a hammer, or he'd shopped for washers of equivalent value, shut himself and his car up in the washing bay, dropped in a slug, jammed the noisy nozzle

under a tire and went for the sledge hammer in the trunk. A blow to the control box crushed the coin plunger and kept the pressure up, once for three days before Zip Eyes got around to his maintenance.

Wilf kept a clean car and conscience: "Now I own the damn Zip Wash." Ice jams the doors, mud blocks the drains, hammer blows block the coin boxes, slugs spill out of little bags onto the bank manager's desk. Everything is accounted for. New contracts are signed, larger slugs go right through and come out the back, larger bags of money slip into the desk where the priesthoods of a few select believers are tucked away.

"I'm already reader for the chaplain, Dick. Can you believe it?" Dick nods from his side of the glass.

Or were we talking forgiveness? Let's not spoil our redemption while the chocolate bunny is melting in our mouths. In stages, when the European guns were restless or the groceries sparse, some of us came here where the European guns were still effective and efficient for ploughing, railroads, and the harvest of uncooperative animals. Of course we always sent the restless boys somewhere for a dose of dollar-a-day honour but we have frowned on guns in the home. We have tried to look on them as sporting. We insist now, enlightened, that the uncooperative animals deserve a sporting chance. Eddie: "If I kill six rabbits in a particular bush, I'd calculate that at least sixty live there. I didn't get them all. They run

much faster than my dogs in deep snow, so quick!" Eddie was a good sport, good shot.

More mercy than that, yet? Aunt Ellie might speak for us here. Please, Aunt Ellie?

"Yes, well, the natives are better off now. They should stop their bellyaching and begging. Well, it's the same as begging when she holds up that filthy straw mat and asks twice what it's worth. Hell, excuse me, but K-Mart's got them from Taiwan for half and better. At least clean, factory-made, a shipload a day because they get up and go to work there. Here, Christ, sorry, you'll probably find her in a cardboard box working straw from a pissy mattress with her fat fingers; nursing something she trucks around with her in a bundle of rags; leaving a trail of bottles."

Thankyou, Aunt Ellie. That was, say, early to mid '50s. She's no longer with us, thank God. We got over that. What with resettlement, teachers, gas and antifreeze subsidies, Indian Affairs -- it's all been turned around. First nations have their proud cultures back, their genuine religions. Businessmen now, owners in suits: airlines, real estate, shopping malls, and now they decide where they want their plumbing to go in. Decision makers: everything but the level of rivers, education and F18's is up to them. There's work all around now: mines, timber, pipes (peace and dreams).

How did we do it? Redress.

\Oxford Digital: LOOKup mode

\Type word and press RETURN to display definitions; press CTR-P to PAUSE screen display; press CTR-R to RESUME scrolling; press ESC to end search and reset LOOKup mode.

\Word: redress [HRt]

\1. v.t. readjust, set straight again, (~the balance, restore equity); set right, remedy, make up for, get rid of, rectify (distress, wrong, damage, grievance, abuse).

\2. n. reparation for wrong, redressing of grievances etc.

\Next entry: Y/N? Y[HRt]

\reduce

\v. 1. convert physically or mentally to other (esp. simpler or more general) form, subject to conversion, make suitable or conformable or adapted to, bring by classification or analysis to.

\2. bring by force or necessity to some state or action, subdue, bring back to obedience.

\3. bring lower; weaken; diminish; convert to smaller number by omission, reclassification, etc.; impoverish.

\Next entry: Y/N? Y[HRt]

\reductio ad absurdum

\1. n. proof of falsity by showing absurd logical consequence; proof of truth by thus proving ^f 'sity of[ESC]

Devil in the back row: red dress, head-dress, paint.
Surely our goodness and mercy will follow you as long as the moon shines and the river flows through the reservation and

over the dam.

So let's have that sermon on the day Wilf gave up his seat on Town Council to serve as Trade Commissioner to the European fashion industry:

text (based on Psalm 72:8):

you need a white man's sermon on behalf of the Indians
leg hold fur:
you would take away meat
fur economies and feet
from the mouths of a few generations
cooperative harvest;
destroy peoples for shiny new
(fish are swimming in your freeze-dried shit up there!)
cities. Vegetables are \$100.00 up there!

chorus from up there:

a psalm for sooth
soothes no one here
for feathers smoothed needs feathers and ours are
singd already.
No, for your smooth white skin sing a psalm for sooth.

response from the congregation:

YOU need a march to the sea for salt!
YOU need a long march to Beijing to overthrow a ruling
intellect!

YOU need two hours of programming in your own language!
OK, YOU need it? Like a hole in the ozone? YOU got it.

"Yes, Miss Red Sky?"

"You may open fire now, yes, Miss Red Sky."

An LED began blinking at Uncle Gord from the recorder. He watched the last bit of tape spool up and stop. But he couldn't stop right away: "Butterflight, sugarpulse, knotmeat, bingebowl. Prepare the table, dear students. Try for that communal feeling after Easter. Pack it away. Above all, worship the Lord, buy in bulk, save on indulgence, don't let your supplies run out wherever you are."

Finally Uncle Gord opened the recorder, popped the tape into his hand and went to the can. Coffee went right through him when he was nervous. He reached his free hand out to flush and the tape splashed into the bowl with the remaining contents of his bladder.

"For God's sake!" he blurted. Uncle Gord grabbed a standby file of old notes including last year's lecture and left for the university, stopping briefly at the deli for a late breakfast.

Because the snow is too wet to stick in the branches, the barbed wire fence is visible within the ditch brush on either side of Wire and Shirley's driveway. The blue Comet is the first car in after the snowfall and the back of it

gropes this way and that through the slush. The driveway expands into the clearing in front of the house and Brick pulls to a stop on Wire's park-anywhere yard. In winter you were free to drive anywhere in Wire's yard; dump a load of gravel or set down the dog's pail where you liked. Only in summer Shirley specified the design according to her herbs, flowers and picnic table.

Shirley parks Brick on a chair at her kitchen table and puts a plate of plump roll kuchen in front of him. Relaxed and chatty, she spreads her attention thickly around the kitchen and into the rest of the house, where her last baby sleeps in a crib pulled into the living room. In and out of the slapping screen door between the mud room and the back yard two visiting nephews from her side charge after her boys with imagined weapons. On their white, wet military field they supply the silly sounds of Red Army rapists and thieves; playing out their own imaginary emigration. Brick listens to the sounds within his mouth and throat as he bites off soft chewy pieces of the bland egg pastry, chews and swallows. Shirley talks about marriage as if it could make a good story, and if sufficiently twisted in the telling, a funny story. She knows June through the bonspiel committee and thinks her a reflective girl, morose.

She says, "I'm sure she would make a wonderful, devoted friend. But the two of you would make a frightful couple. I can see you brooding together, years on end, without

saying a word."

Brick likes her whimsy but not her warning. It sounds right, but he knows he can disbelieve it. Shirley could comfort a young male ego: she made what she thought easy to dismiss. "I'm in no position to say one way or the other," she says.

Shirley puts a call through and talks to Wire on the radios set up in her kitchen. Brick gestures an offer to speak to Wire but she waves it off.

She tells him Wire's expecting him and if he's willing to stay the night could he drive Wire home tomorrow, probably in time for lunch? Several weeks ago Wire did the ball joints for Brick and promised him a brake job in spring so tonight Brick can't say no to bringing Wire out of the bush for a 'real' weekend, as Shirley labelled a weekend from Friday night through Sunday. Ordinarily Wire kept his truck in top shape but he's had to wait weeks for rod pins. Brick doesn't mind Wire's lapse into dependence. He'll drink with him tonight and chauffeur him home Friday.

As Brick leaves he promises Shirley to get Wire home by early afternoon at the latest. "I'll have lunch ready," she tells Brick. "I brought the last of the dill in yesterday, before the storm, so it'll be my last batch of summer borscht. With fresh buns."

He's supposed to pass along the seduction. The sky is clear and a winter clench grips the air. He has ten minutes to get to the vendor. The disc jockey breaks into a fading

song to greet him with the updated dope on the unfolding universe: "Could go down to ten tonight. Better have the tires and antifreeze checked!" The hard edges of the track to the Vendor's door are more convincing than the 'blizzard' that winter is near. Brick throws a case of beer into the trunk.

Wire's landing is off Braintree Road, a single lane of which is cleared with the heavy flat berm scooped, fortunately, to the opposite side of Wire's turnoff. Brick pulls his summer-tired Comet past, throws it into reverse, swings the wheel and backs in as fast as he can. He gets half way to the trailer. Wire left a lot of trees up around his trailer this time. They had shaken off the heavy snow which had cleaned them of some dead branches and the last clinging leaves. In the main the sticks are intact. A crowd of them stands in light around Wire's porch. Brick can feel snowcrust break against his ankles as he shuffles along the rest of the driveway towards the light. Shards skitter across the surface ahead of him. Inside the lean-to porch on the end of Wire's trailer the bulb hangs from two wires and an untaped splice. Its light shines through the aluminum storm door into the trees and burnishes their ice. In wet boots Brick trespasses on the dry earthen floor inside the porch. He reaches for the doorknob without climbing the steps, yanks open the door and flings up the two-four, sliding it ten feet across worn white linoleum into the trailer.

Wire, standing in front of his radios and holding a mike in both hands, stops the beer with his foot and shoves it back. He swivels a forearm at Brick's boots and parka. "Keep 'em on, buddy. I'm trying to get a call from Mitts hooked in here."

Brick knew Mitts from hearsay. Stories circulated because Wire kept his plane tied up summers in her back bay. He'd been there a week getting his plane out at last year's freezeup. Sometimes he called her fish hatchery 'Rainbow Stockings.'

"We'll have to boogie up there and get my plane out of hock," Wire says and sets the mike into its holder. "The bay's starting to ice up."

Wire's radios are quiet. The brothers stand where they are for several seconds. Brick thinks of a station that's gone off the air and transmits silence along its approved wavelength, coughing now and again in the night. Then Shirley's voice, without waver or hiss, speaks cold and clear as October stars and planets in a high pressure sky.

"Wendel, you there? Sorry. I hope its hooked up. It's about the lake freezing. You ready? Wendel, you . . ."

Wire holds the mike for a moment in a limp hand. He tips his forearm up and squeezes the mike button with his thumb, interrupting Shirley's anxiety. "Yo, Shirl, Wendel. You still got Mittens on the line there? Mitts?"

A bout of mike thumbing brings clarification and George is hooked in, calling from the store at Lake Two Lakes.

"No, pardon. Its George here from George's Landing, Mr. James."

"George! Good. What's up in your neck of the woods? You frozen in yet, over?"

"No ice on the big water yet, Mr. James. However, Mrs. Brandt was by here for some PVC fittings in a mad rush to save her fingerlings. She said to give you a call. She wants you to know Separation Bay is coming in fast tonight, but she says if you get here tomorrow she can still icebreak you out with the eighteen. Over."

"Good, George. I'm on my way. Thanks for the call. And, oh, your docks are clear, eh? I've got a small job on the bird that'll need the TIG welder if I can get it over there, over."

"Should be good here, Mr. James. Only the sheltered bays are icing up so far. And Mr. James, is it possible you could pick up a bottle of acetylene on the way. I don't know if Gillis's is on the way for you, or even open. Never mind if its too late. I've got plenty of oxygen but I'm short on acetylene. It would be doing me a big favour. Over."

"Ten four on the green, George, if you can use a hundred cube. I have a full one here at the camp. We'll try to make it by midnight. Out.

"That would be excellent, Mr. James. Bye bye. Don't worry about the deposit, please. Out."

"Shirley, you on the line yet?"

Shirley clicks back in and tidies up her broken expectations for Wire's time while Brick listens: "Yeah. C'mon. No no. Yeah yeah." Speeches concerning kids and shopping. There's a promise to be back Saturday morning. Brick doesn't hear a ten four. Shirley tells him later, explaining the radio communications, that a ten four from Wire was the odds she placed on his showing up when he said he would.

Wire has to get his plane over to Edwin's for a refit to skis during freezeup. It's a five hour trip to George's store from Wire's camp and they'll spend the night at the hatchery. They begin to pack gear into Brick's car right away. Brick is to pick Wire up late tomorrow night or Saturday morning, probably, at Edwin's on the river just south of Winnipeg.

Wire insists on driving. They share the tension of gravel and ice until they reach the highway, dry now except for the occasional puddle of black ice. But two grime-caked Greyhound buses go by them in quick succession dragging their wet filth. Brick reaches past Wire's flailing fingers and activates the windshield washer/wiper assembly. A cuticle of windshield clears in time for Wire to keep the sedan on the road.

\UPLoad Peter

\CCC

*T Trouble Shooting the Washer/Wiper Assembly

*CHART

PROBLEM	FAULT	FIX
no water on one side only	- blocked line after pump	- disconnect and blow out line
	- loose or broken line after pump	- reconnect or replace line
no water at all	- empty reservoir	- refill reservoir
	- blocked, loose or broken line before pump	- blow out, reconnect or replace line
	- blown washer pump fuse	- check, replace fuse
	- finished pump motor	- check supply voltage at motor terminals; if OK, replace pump motor

\ready TSC_1289.CCC

"So, kid." Wire launches his body against the seat back and discovers two more notches of legroom. "Where were we?"

You got the world wadded up into God's little spitball yet?"

Brick's eyes are drying and he has difficulty blinking. Wire thought the heat wasn't working at first and the interior is suddenly besieged with dry, hot air. "You're making metaphors out of molehills again," he charges. "You don't read scripture, you imagine it."

At their last meeting in Wire's trailer the brothers' debate was about the usefulness of the book of Revelation. Brick had argued that the drama of such a vision, if translated into theatre, perhaps cinematic form, could still scare the shit out of people, wake them out of their indifference. Wire had argued that the nuclear bombs themselves hadn't scared sense into the powers that be; that people could no longer learn anything from apocalyptic visions because reality had caught up with the worst you could write, that the most radical gospel was the simplest common sense: take a screwdriver to the bomb factory and take the things apart.

Brick doesn't want to fall asleep. He can usually stay awake for an argument, even with beer. They'd have been through a dozen by now, back at the trailer. A path to the outhouse would be beaten wider every twenty minutes. Minor issues would dissolve, larger ones line up for their attention.

"What about the spitball?" queries Brick. But he falls asleep.

Brick's eyes become sticky with sludge. No snow has

fallen this far north. He wakes and a half moon lights up the world. The earth reflects that light somewhere else, he thinks. The solar system is a mobile bouncing light around. The bit that reaches us we clutch at. For a nanosecond we might have it, then it gets away. What we can grab, we grab.

Through small cracks between his numb eyelids the trees are a black shape, rising and falling on the passing ridges, disappearing at the bridges and lakes. Bays in the lee of the wind shine opaque and black, the ice reflecting a steady copy of the sky. The windward water sparkles when the Comet-dragged moonlight sweeps over it. From time to time Brick shifts awake.

"You still stuck on June?"

"The month or the person?" He thinks he's in love with June, but he's not facing it yet. And they'd spoken too, recently, about June as a month of deadlines for Brick. "I'll graduate, I'll have my acceptance to the U. of A. I'll work for you over the summer: chauffeur," he teases.

"And the girl?"

Brick sees no need to talk about June. He's about to be heavily in love with her but won't fly into Wire's trap. He's happy to let gossips trail their threads because he's too big to catch. But to hear Wire ask about her surprises him.

He dodges. "So Shirley picks up the talk and pursues me through you now?"

Wire gives Brick enough silence to formulate some regret for that accusation and asks, "How do you fit a woman into your plans? You're not thinking of yoking yourself unequally, are you?"

"Not unequally, no."

"But she's not a believer like you, Brick. A heathen as sure as I'm born again."

"What do you mean? She believes her way. What's unequal about it?"

"You were baptized as a believer. Was she baptized?"

"Yeah."

"As a baby?"

"Yeah."

"Confirmed?"

"Yeah. So?"

"Always went to church? No lapses I guess?" He adds triumph to his tone, "You see, she's keeping up appearances. Do you discuss the gospel of Jesus Christ?"

"Oh for crying . . . Wire!"

"No: see, you've got one of the devil's mainliners there, man."

Once among Brick's hockey teammates, before he'd gone out with her, June's name came up in the locker room. She, like others, was a piece of ass. That is: Now there's a piece of ass; heavy duty! But he heard no more qualifying adjectives applied to that general description. No one seemed able to comment on whether it was nice ass, or great,

or tight, or whatever. So he nurtures the idea of her inexperience. And she was quite a bit younger and a grade behind him.

"She can't follow me to university next year," he said.

"She'll admire you from afar and wait for you," said Wire. Brick knows it's irony and believes it anyway.

Brick's eyes blink open at midnight. Gravel hiss slows and quits; a suspension thump and the whap of the Ford's rubber on bridge boards hammers the silence. Two black stems of flat water branch into a lake of light-emitting rice on his side of the '64 Comet and, looking past Wire, who drives studiously and alone, he peers through silver birches with the moon on them into a more unreflective space: open water. Brick pulls off his glasses with one hand and swivels the knuckles of the other in his eye sockets. "Where we at?" he asks.

Wire, piloting the 4-door over the narrow bridge, says, "We're here, if this is us . . . or we're somebody else. Weir here, we're here!" Wire howls unconvincingly at the moon and sings, "The moon is a boon. Just crossing the last weir as a matter of fact. George's should just be coming up. Hey Brick, Shirley's new joke with the kids: 'if he' - - pointing at me -- 'was a werewolf, and I was a werewolf, were we a waswolf?'"

A minute passes and Wire swings the car sharply left. The high beams cross a sign:

EAT - BAIT - TACKLE
RENTALS - GAS - GROCERIES
GEORGE'S
FAMOUS CURRIED PICKEREL

Another small, freshly painted one says:

TROUT
rush-D-lish
Fishery

A gravel yard expands in front of a store and dips down to a dock, unoccupied and glowing moon-bleached between two narrow strips of sand. Grey humps to the left along the water's edge are upside down boats and Brick guesses correctly that evenly spaced box shapes to the right of the dock are benches set in cement and surrounded by neatly manicured grass above the beach.

Lights come on at the store front porch and inside. Wire ignores them and backs the Comet into the unlit driveway beside the store and up to a garage about fifty feet back. A fluorescent light flutters on in the garage while Brick and Wire stand around the still-running Comet, yawning and stretching and pushing gravel with their boots.

"Got the green guy here," Wire says to a shape moving between the store and the garage.

"That you, Mr. James? Welcome. Hello? Hello! Didn't expect you this early, good. I'll get the door. I've got a dolly back there. One minute, please. You brought me a hundred pounder there, right?"

Wire reaches into the Comet, switches off, and brings the keys out to open the trunk. He and Brick lift the tank out and, at Wire's nod, continue to hold it, fingers pulled taught against muscles in their necks. The garage door opens and against a stream of George's grateful protests and instructions the brothers carry the acetylene around a Chevy half ton and place it into the empty slot beside the oxygen on the welding dolly.

"Brick can run your empty back, if you want, George. By the way, this is Brick. Brick, George. I'm Wendel. Hi."

George smiles, greets, thanks, says he'll cover the deposit, for them not to bother with the return, and invites them into the store. Then he locks up and kills the garage lights.

Ideas for a night's supply of cigarillos and snacks run through Brick's head as he and Wire begin browsing; shopping as if Safeway had just opened. Wire fills a couple of boxes with general, practical supplies. He goes over to speak with George and throws in Betty Crocker Mix, Bird's Custard, Spanish sardines: "Several items," he confides to Brick, "that Mitts never buys for herself."

"We're keeping you up, George. We'll need a boat to get

over. Just show us a motor and tank of gas and Brick and I can take care of it."

But George says the boats are chained and everything locked up in the boat shed. He wants to settle the account here first, pay them the balance he owes, and then he'll go down with them and put a boat in.

"There's a fiberglass model with lights under the tarp down there . . . if you think you'll be using lights. The two of you could carry the Merc down. It's up in the garage already . . . and the battery, if you like?"

"No. No." Wire says. "Lights. Hell. Just what you got down there to ferry us over. Any little outboard, George."

The sound of a boat making a night run ceases and George bends up from his calculator, grabs his step-up stocking stool and moves to the shore-side wall. He leaps onto the stool, flicks a switch on the sill and peers at the lake through the small window over the cereal boxes. Wire goes to the door, leans out, and beckons Brick with his head. The waterfront is lit dimly with two spots on a single pole at the end of the dock. In silhouette a lean figure, crouching at a mooring ring, flings her hands out, lifts a lean body upright, and walks up the gravel slope towards the store.

"That's Mitts!" Wire shoves past the screen door. Brick catches the backswing and begins a chase after Wire but stops on the bottom step. He watches the converging couple, striding, suddenly strange.

"Mitts!" Wire shouts twice before reaching her. Then a bear hug, a swirl around for Mitts, and one for Wire which he aids with several hops on one foot.

Loosening his grip: "Hey, I brought my kid brother." Swiveling his head: "Brick?"

Brick shuffles out of the light around the porch towards them, and feeling the impersonality of night vision, looks steadily at Mitts.

"Brick. Mitts." Wire introduces.

"Hi Brick. You're not driving back tonight I hope? No. You're staying with me, too. Tonight at least. I've finally got that porch closed in, Wendel. Not finished, but it's a place. Bender was here for a week in September and fixed it up that much. God, he sort of settles in, that guy. I won't heat it this winter, but anyways, there always was enough room so you'll have floor space and a heap of blankets at least, Brick, if not a bed. I think I've had more visitors this summer than the last five put together. You guys bring bags?"

"I brought George up a bottle of acetylene," says Wire.

"What'd you bring me? Brick, your brother's really on his toes when his plane's about to be iced in. Zippity-do he's down here, eh Wendel? What'd you bring the fish lady?"

"What'd you need? There's nothing a fish or any other kind of lady could use from my camp. We came straight from the landing." Wire looks a tad embarrassed.

"We're keeping George up," he says. "C'mon, Brick. Let's

show her the order we put together in there."

"Surprise me out of George's store?" The three make their way into the store, Mitts jabbering: "Hey, George. Thanks for reaching Mr. James for me. How'd you scare him out of those deep dark woods of his so fast? Listen, I finally got that trickler going in the upper fingerling tanks. You're right, that stuff bends nicely with the torch. Figure I have a week to move that lot now. With any luck they'll be here tomorrow. George, do you mind calling Parks first thing in the morning? Describe my situation as desperate. Not desperate. Just say I can only keep them so long. George, sorry, sometimes if you bug 'em enough. Early next week for sure."

George remains quiet. Smiles once and says 'good' twice. He reaches beside the cash and picks up a rubber-banded bundle of glossy magazines and newsprint publications, and with a separate gesture places several business letters with them on the counter. He thrums his fingers quickly on the envelopes and says, "You forgot these, Mrs. Brandt. Is that everything for you gentlemen?"

"Yeah. I think. Brick, you got something there? Nope, let's settle up."

"Oh shit. What do I owe you, George?" Mitts tears into the envelopes one after the other and signs several cheques. "OK. Listen, cash this one and where's one of those envelopes you send to the bank. No. George, you take the alimony. Let me have another envelope, a small one. The

Family Allowance goes to Mom for Germ -- I'm always thinking, like germ warfare or something, poor kid. We had a ball this summer. OK. Fisheries for me. This, this and this into the bank envelope. Should I write cheques yet? Look, I'll get all this ready. I'll be back with the boy -- Brick, sorry -- anyways, in a couple of days, eh? Maybe tomorrow. George, what does it come to now? Add the stamps for these."

Brick watches George tap the calculator, Mitts acknowledges his numbers, and Wire takes a cheque from him against the balance owed on the acetylene. Wire moves the car to the front of the store, tests all four doors, and the three go to the boat. Mitts gets in the back and tugs and twists the Evinrude to life. Wire hangs on to the boxes in the middle and Brick takes the bow seat. Lamp post light lights the dock until they pull away.

The moon clip has already set when Mitts throws the Evinrude sideways, brings the boat parallel to her mooring rings, and kills the outboard with a pull on the choke knob. In starlight the dock hovers above the still buzzing water and on the shoreline above it: darkness, no buildings visible. The aluminum boat bobs on its own wake and drifts towards the dock. Brick can just make out the boulders, following their sound as the wake rolls along the shore and dissipates around the point. Mitts puts out a hand and holds the stern from drifting under the deck. Painter in hand Brick reaches and begins tying it to the mooring ring.

"There's usually a week of water out front here after the bay's frozen in," Mitts says. "If you want you can bring the plane around and stay for a few days." The proposal glues them to the boat for another minute while the water stills and reflects a slow bend of moonlight panels. Brick feels a shiver through the keel and Mitts scrunches her shoulders. She places a hand on Wire's shoulder, steps up onto the dock and secures the stern.

"You guys admire this as long as you like. I'll get the lights. Why anyone leaves is still a mystery to me. I try to like the city, get there, binge out . . ."

She stops part way up the path. "Wendel knows what I mean, eh Brick? Why do you think he lives in the bush all winter?"

She turns up the path again, speaking. "Why do you think he keeps a plane up here, parked. Was he here even once after Victoria Day? Oh yeah, once in June . . ."

"She talks to the trees," Wendel mutters in his defence.

"I heard that." She keeps walking, louder. "You're a talker, too, Wendel. Only you can't listen. Yeah. You know all about 'em but you don't want to hear too much from the trees. You've got to get out weekends, back to the noise. Somehow you keep that urban demon off you. Me, . . ." Mitts suddenly shuts off.

"It's her own voices she hears. You get used it," Wire explains.

\MAC [merge with LTR_1189.MAC]

Macy, this guy you've moved in with. Your mother hasn't been concerned enough to call or write me about him -- I guess he's great, eh? I'm not advising you to leave him. I just want you to know that he's male; that is, he's leavable. But you know that about us. If you love him, fine, that's good.

Maybe I have learned something during the years you've been gone. Your mother's assessment was perfectly accurate: all the years we were together I ran your lives, or tried. Now I think you know, knew all along, that it didn't have much to do with my bum legs. Oh, I'm sure you heard plenty of your mother's insults along those lines and I thought for a long time that my dictatorial style was natural compensating behaviour; not excusable, but understandable at least and maybe even forgivable. Well, not true either. Men, however weak-kneed, have a more crippling handicap, Macy. It's assumed they must master everything.

Often I don't have a choice. Do you remember how ornery I got when I had a deadline to meet? We used to say 'for Peter' and I'd work late for weeks on end and 60 hours non-stop sometimes to meet a deadline. I still do this though I manage it better now, and no one else has to live with it. Loneliness is the ideal arrangement for dictators. But you knew what I was doing, eh Macy? 'Writing books' you used to tell people. Well it was that and there's no arguing that the only effective way to publish a book is to slave-

drive it through to final production. Anyone in the way, or just hanging around, gets run over. However, one of the contracts Peter and I had was a set of manuals and updates for part of a military weapon. For two years we became the masters of technical information for the mechanics and engineers who mastered the machines for the button pushers who mastered the air for the great men whose first concern was to keep women and children safe in their beds. You get the picture. I was miserable. We sang the pep songs of industrial teamwork but felt the muscle and bone of twisted arms. That's my point; I got a very bad taste for ruling the world. The project is still classified although it's probably something common in nearly all missile technology today. I don't know much about it anymore.

Fortunately one of the elders at Peter's church suspected what we were up to (the CIA might have helped us maintain a cover as commercial manual writers if they'd known the first thing about our religion) and we were both called before the conference board to explain. Then they offered us financial help to recover our business as we switched back to non-military projects.

It goes on, of course, muscling the manuals into shape. I do my best to choose the gentler technologies when I can, but to be honest I'll still master almost anything to make a living. For the most part I behave myself within the capitalist pattern of dominance. Many women do too, more all the time. It's one way to feel less subservient to it,

I guess.

Sorry, Macy, I got off the subject of this guy you like. Anyway, all I wanted to say is you don't have to participate in this master scenario if you don't want. If you can personally find another way to live it's all right with me. In fact I would love it, as I love you, always,

your Canadad

\LTR_1289.MAC

A cold diesel cranks over twice, hacks, then rivets the shorelines to the lake. A moment later yellow porch lights light up a house in front of Brick and Wire. Interior lights blaze from the rooms and a yard light on the hatching shed shines on Mitt's network of tanks which are tiered down to the water on the opposite side of the dock. A car horn begins to blast out a rhythm.

"Not the horn!" Wire cries above the noise, his face in full light. He bows and shakes his head, wipes his fingers through his hair and across his eyes, grips the boxes and lifts them onto the dock. "Let's go."

\EDN

Dear Edna,

One of the two Old Testament creation stories says God created Adam first; that is, after the animals but before Eve, and had him get to know all the animals before he noticed that this lonely man felt something missing. Then

he created a helper for him, a companion, Eve, whom Adam recognized as made from himself, from the same material. Was that fair? If anything God is just, right? What if, on the sixth day, he took this lunch break in the sequence of creation to do some business with Adam before Eve was placed at his side? Might they have struck some deal to give Adam status above Eve, as her master? That would not, of course, have been fair.

Yet God did not apparently wait to create the females of any other species when he made the males. He wanted sex drive, copulation, reproduction . . . or did God create Adam sexless? Maybe that was his excuse to overlook a woman. Then he could have waited to create Adam's sex at the same time as he created Eve.

Or maybe God realized that Adam had turned out a little too much like the animals to deny him sexual desires and reproductive organs and outfitted him even though he wasn't interested in populating the world with people at first; just to stop his whining. At least one Rabbi thought so.

Adam may have arrived fully equipped and then satisfied his sexual urges by fucking animals, who complained.

What I want to know, Edna, is whether there's a way to read Adam's priority at creation as no argument at all for his priority in human relationships: politics (power), work (power), bodies (power). I know you're right: power. But if I don't rename all its devices I'm going to get the hang of it, Edna. You know the thrill of new words, the power

they deliver: its inside information, like being able to change the driver's side door lock every spring. That thrill is there, Edna, but I want to ignore it. I want to feel the sexual advantages seep out of me, to try and learn a language that destroys enemies instead of creating them.

What's done with the stories of creation is largely, if not altogether, determined by what's at stake in the human arrangements of their interpreters. But we assume as well that the stories were written as they were because of what was at stake for the authors. The process, then, of selecting stories to represent our condition, our pasts, presents and futures, is a multiple choice test of our awareness of the world and our reading skills. Are our sexualized relationships unjust? Yes. Is our canon of stories responsible? Yes, as read. Can we stop reading the stories? Some -- there'd be others. There should be more. But they could be read differently? I hope so. Specifically: is a woman who is wife, mother, lover without options, and economically dependent on a man able to read the story of Adam and Eve as a fair representation of how good it was in the beginning to make the world that way? Not bloody likely. Edna, I'm talking to myself. You send me syllabi and reading lists from your night courses in the city, what do you expect? Repentance, I know -- and I send you syllabub.

love,

BJ

\LTR_1289.EDN

Wire dances a little. Brick dances more but feels self-conscious though he's a better dancer than Wire: the house shakes less. Also, Mitts embarrasses him. Her breasts fit above Brick's: snug under his collar bone when she plays the Tiajuana Brass.

The three sit in a row, on a green sofa with their backs to the glass front wall and look towards the fireplace. No one makes a fire. Mitt's wood stove shares the chimney and keeps the place stifling hot on this windless night. Mitts says it's good wood and puts on Country Joe and the Fish. They smoke Brick's tipped Old Ports, take square, thin-lipped pulls from two bottles: Teacher's and a CC, and talk softly about places occupied; loudly about those travelled past along their nations' routes of exploration, charted, mapped and paved. Brick feels closer to home when Jimi Hendrix sings "Red House." The diesel throbs and the lights blaze.

\EDN

\Dear Ed[ESC]

\UPLoad Peter

Just a note on transferable technical skills re/ consumer consciousness. I'm worried, Peter, that the religious language we're using in our marketing strategy will get

people believing that a 15% increase in efficiency from their gas furnace (cleaning the flame ports annually and the reusable filters every month during the heating season) will induce them to accept technical fixes as the cure for global social-economic ills. Once we trust chemical engineers, bankers and the federal treasury book makers, Peter, to calculate formulas much too technical for the rest of us in the best interest of the world's intricately woven economies with fair international distribution to all who work and all who have need . . . well, we've jumped ship, eh? Isn't the joke on us, Peter? Some Country Joe Na Na Naa Na . . . Wait a minute, something

\ardor s-s-sardor sardoris sardorsal sardine love\Peter?

\Sum: swallowed hook line and sea legs. Bark's departed. Bard's in the fish, f-f-feeling conned.

\Says to self: We'll just write ourself out-a-here, eh!

\Says: Gimme-an-F. Can I be this slimy, this soft, this slimy little slobbering soft body? Is it possible to feel wet-in-a-whale? My palms fin the fish walls, feel the paddle-pulls, the hydraulics; they grasp a shiner, they feel that, too -- fellow fish in the belly . . . But wait, before I suck plankton for the last time, imagine me back on deck, leaning on the ferry's rail, no gun at my head, but the gun in my head thinking: Jump! No? Just watch me! Watch me not get up, not in the morning, not at noon. Watch me not buy bread, not buy a paper, avoid guns. Imagine me, if you will, in a world without AP CP Reuters Washington

Post. Easier than one without guns? Or one without butter? Which? Which is easier: a world without guns, or a world without bread and butter, in a world without news? There are limited and boundless tricks to this and that subterfuge. There's subterranean fugue. There's the EL in Literature. Seen it, never rode it. Does it take you to a dive when you need one? I like those fudges better that take you overhead one minute and then down, down, down . . . offline. Did I say fudges? Aaaah, so then there are those chocolate sea bottoms.

\Phenomenon: gimme-an-I and assume trouble. If you catch me reading in bad light just remember the locomotive pulling me back to the birth place: I'm becoming woman. Must be: the clickety-clack, the burning house flashing past, the headlights on the highway: endless rhythm, forever burning, forever watched. Me writing train, writing train letters, writing on substandard train writing stationary. So it's night. So it's inevitable and and and a man's legs bump mine every few seconds and at the very next station, Wawa or someplace, they get off. I couldn't please him enough. He showed me a body part, a flap handy in his pants for it and its smell, lifted his bootless foot and wiggled my lips. I showed him my yeast culture for his edification, dragged aside my clothing and parted several labia for better eye contact (at this he bent at the neck at 90 degrees) and encouraged him to wash his sock soon. The head jerked back, the sock withdrew, the boots, the dick, gone. I look it up

and find penis located on a peninsula between penicillin and penitence. So I get to Nipigon-Red Rock. My friend makes plywood and then when he's laid off he volunteers at the March of Dimes. I didn't exactly promise to stop so I stay on to Thunder Bay. There's a shelter-for-men and a hostel number. I get on a crosstown to the bus depot, get a ticket on the eastbound that stops at the youth hostel: that-you-passed an hour ago, but, if-you-tell-the-driver says Mrs. Silverside on the phone sounding like the mom of all milk and comfort, yes, I want to come there. So it's sit here on these molded cheeksticky fibreface to face terminal row lookalike seats or walk out onto the expressway flanked by industrial stone and steel dust yards and breathe the slow diesel drift of one-after-another, but, one-at-a-time tremblings on the lonesome highway and walk as far as the lights on a robin rooster with feet, with brots on, straddling an unblinking donut on the far side of that intersection. I imagine going for a donut, but, before-I-know-it I get on the backeast bus and I indicate to the driver and he knows where on the highway to stop, doesn't, forgets, remembers, flags a goingwest colleague talk-about-friendly-will-you take the little lady where she wants to go but I don't transfer, stay on, transact a trip to Nipigon-Red Rock. Yes, I wanted to go to Red Rock and anyway we're on our stupid way. Who woulda swallowed Silverside? And anyway I'm in Nipigon at 4:45 in the -- Roy says 4:45 in the morning for Chris' sake -- morning. Yet

the creeks are lined with men, women and children (GIMME-AN-S) fishing a thick smelt run and filling buckets and buckets with the flashlight light silver slipperies in minutes. In minutes for Chris' sake! say the 4-by-beer boys. Roy's a 4-by-beer boy who belongs to ninety pound girlfriend, She. She works 8, 10 hours in plaid shirt and tails starting with the 6 am donut shift for 4-by-beer boys roaring outa the plywood plant and the other, completely phoreign 4-by-beer boys roaring in.

\Roy's at the depot in 5, 6 minutes: says the call didn't wake She in his bed. There's a 24 hour donut place next to her donut shop. We go there for coffee and then we'll pick her up and have breakfast at She's shop.

I'll say: Mmm good. She, you make terrific coffee.

\She'll say: its a machine preset franchise blend machine.

\Mmm good, but I know there's a knack: I'll say. I was going to be Roy's girlfriend, for-a-minute-there, too, damn it.

\And so I am. Me. She. Roy and the cat. Life together minute after minute.

\An inability not to imagine a story is exploited here: last night I did not find the text act to be a contradiction of my love for God. It was the night before Easter and all through the house we linked bottle arms, and waved our glass arms, and fell on the floors and fucked like fish: the cat and the cushions.

\First I'll address the cat: shift my eyes from the clock

at 3:something, blink next into the clockface at 10:15, then into your catface, cat. The reasons: that launch to the lap, that awful sing-for-your-supper song, that cleft call for technical assistance with the cupboard door, and that crank' claw at the can opening. The result: You can litter anywhere in this clutter but I'm not about to dish it. Cut your lips, cat. You never do. Aaah, so there's always a cat bit: Mrraaagh. Mrrk? rm-rm-rm.

\It takes 3,4 minutes to cross Nipigon at 4:55 am. In the first donut shop I say: I came by ferry, two trains, three buses and a 4-by to-this-specific-town, Dick. So there's this instant cure. I'm Burn-a-Debt of the Big-Trucks. The workers slam their lockers for home and the morning shift workers backs-out-a-their-driveways at the same moment and all together, suddenly, descend on the donut shops shouting fuck it fuck it fuck it with joy. Four square blocks turn into a demolition derby where the boys that got the biggest have no advantage. I ride the donut sign shotgun standing on some sort of bracket and clutching the mug handle and a 4-by-honking cheer rises up to me each time the donut dips into the coffee and I am revealed behind it. A heavy burden is lifted. The plywood lays down flat, glues itself (structures straight and presses true), stacks itself neatly in the warehouse, forks its way to the loading dock, nails to the framing, floors the joists, panels the safety wall through which passers by look at deconstruction in repentant cities.

\An inability not to imagine a text is exploited here: take a sheaf of blanks to the bookbinder and prove it. Who needs a jet ink mate laser-belled and whistled paperpartner partner to take dictation? Nobody but I can save this text, ncbody but I. Not necessarily the position you want to be in in the middle of a working day, but. Out to lunch. The menu suggests (OK, what the hell, GIMME-THE-FISH) my mission: SAVE FILE, next to RENAME, next to DELETE. I bite. I click on SAVE out of respect for the next generation because they too will suck and gill for oxygen.

\4-by-by-phor (headers by Doug): Ninety percent of registered inventions accredited to Nipigon have been the brainchildren of Roy's Uncle One Speed, resort operator, who in 1947 stepped on the gas of his roadster and then on the brake and suddenly saw no need for two sprung pedles for the one operation. Six hours in the shop and his speed was thereafter regulated by the one peddle, and the choice as to which limit of the peddle's trajectory, the tensed or the untensed, should represent a bias towards motility, Roy assured me, and he was an honest kid who himself only relaxed when he was going fast, was arbitrary hey hey goodbye.

"You guys have two minutes to find a bed. Party's over. No wait. I have this one: Otis Redding you've got to hear. This'll make us very sleepy."

Brick had thought the night was old when they had turned

into George's, and again in the boat. Now he feels bewildered by the comfort of unnoticed time and the theoretical fear of lost sleep. He beds down in the porch, too warm to shut himself into the mummy bag but too tired to bother falling asleep outside it.

By noon the sun was high and hot and a stiff breeze blew steadily. The first hot day in June? Brick tried to remember his climb into the sleeping bag, the last dance. Leaves and twigs hit the glass and scratched along the deck along the front of the house. "That wind's warm!" he heard Mitts shout up from the dock. "And blowing straight into the bay. Weird." Wire had the plane around to the front dock. It was clean and it sparkled in the spray. The chop splashed over its pontoons while it fought against snapping ropes. Wire was busy inside the plane, preflighting. Mitts lay nude on the wet wing, hollering and happy. "I want to water ski!" she shouted. She leaped onto the dock and pulled two skis and a faded red nylon tow rope out of the fuselage behind Wire's seat. She tied the rope to an eye on the nearest pontoon and stepped into the rubber boots. "I'll fix those for you!" Brick yelled, running jubilantly down the path. He just about had the heels moved up to clamp Mitts' high arched feet in the sticky rubber, but he found himself stretching to reach her lips and slipping up into her silky body. When the plane rose out of the whitecaps and got too high, Mitts had to drop the rope and

land and sink back into the water. Brick swam hard and slipped into her again there, in the sea.

It was in fact nearly noon. Brick was naked and freezing in a cheap Canadian Tire bag. Wire and Mitts lay snuggled together in two separate sleeping bags beside him. Wire snored steadily and she sniffled and pressed her nose into the material, wadded up. Her eyes opened just as Brick discovered with relief that the semen had dried onto his stomach and thighs. He could flake it off, carefully. The little hairs hurt. When he saw Mitts looking at him he reached for his jeans under the bag and discovered it was the belt buckle that had ached his shoulder all night. He was just toeing his gotch up from the bottom of the bag when Mitts smiled, lifted a finger from its clutch on her covers and placed it vertically across puckered lips. "Shh. I've shut off the water in the bathroom but there's warm water on the stove. You can wash at the kitchen sink." Reassured, Brick pulled on the shorts and socks and padded over to the kitchen. He could feel the whole house quiver and snap on its frozen post and beam platform. There was no water on the stove but the cold water tap worked and Brick found a dishcloth. He soaked and rinsed his penis and thighs quickly but as the dishcloth went back under the tap for a last rinse Mitts' hands were there, too. Her body shivered against his back. She soaped her hands and ran them around his genitals. Then she soaped the cloth and did his armpits and feet. Taking the entire bucket of warm

water from the stove she poured it over them both in preparation for a shampoo and shave.

Waking lazily, Brick confuses the two dreams, wondering which made him cream the bag. Fortunately his underwear is in there and he can wipe up and bundle the whole thing home. He reaches for his jeans and socks and warms them. Wire's bag and towel are folded up by the door and he hears their voices outside. Heat from the kitchen is steaming into the porch so Brick quickly dresses and finds a pot of coffee simmering, already perked.

The voices come from up the hill, past the shed. Brick finds a back door through the pantry. It sticks, but he hits it with his shoulder and steps out into bright sunlight. "Coffee's ready!" he blurts. Wire is poking at the ground in the vicinity of the outhouse with a long handled spade.

"You up? Great. We're coming," puffs Mitts. "How'd you sleep?" She steps by him into the pantry but hesitates and looks at the strips of white caulk dangling around the door frame. "I don't use this door after, like, last week," she says. "It lets in too much cold."

Brick notices that he's torn away most of the fresh caulking. He pushes a lot of it back into place and follows Wire into the house for breakfast.

"Leave that, Brick. Next warm day. I've got plenty of that stuff and I'll touch it up. When the snow's deep I

build a path from the side porch to the outhouse with a few steps in it. Pancakes OK? Mom made blueberry syrup when she was up with Germ. You'll love it."

Mitts talks through breakfast. Wire wants to dig her a new pit, move the outhouse, and leave, probably, the next day.

Mitts says no. "You guys should relax, enjoy it up here. How often does Brick get to the lake? I'll eat less."

Brick sees that she can use Wire's skill as sanitation engineer: Wire had dug the previous pit four years ago. Then he tells them that he'll take a ride back to George's and go on back to town, that he wants to stay, but, he has to see several people and get his own page proofs ready for a meeting Monday morning. His mind is on the school paper, true. He can also imagine staying to lime and fill Mitts' old shit hole, no big deal. But he's browned off at Wire because he has no notion of responsibility, doesn't put down roots.

Wire and I arrived at a dark wood-rich staircase in the nation's Parliament Building. Descending, we found ourselves about to step into a corridor where, between austere portraits of past politicians on both walls, there was a series of closed doors. Then a door opened to reveal people moving, rapidly and businesslike, behind it. Other doors opened and more people, coming and going between them, quickly filled the corridor. The door we wanted, 'Minister of State,' was just before us at the bottom of the stairs

and it opened as someone leaving burst through in a huff.

We walked in, myself first, to find ourselves in a jumbled queue. People, some sitting up, some lounging, most on their feet looking about them, formed a barely perceptible order of priority in the direction of an another open door. Voices resembling live human communication, often interrupted and broken into the shortest speeches possible, emerged along with the drone of a voice recording. During sporadic lulls in the noise we heard a somber muffled voice carrying indistinguishable meanings but the unmistakable authority of the Minister of State.

When people walked out -- I remember four stern and ruddy men whom I pictured riding multi-coloured horses in the family's circus -- others walked in. Within a short time of standing about the back of the line we comprehended a pattern in the petitioners' approach to the minister's door. It was a polite free-for-all where if you were next in line you could enter the minister's room any time you liked. People hung about the minister's door and as people came out, those on deck stepped inside, sometimes several parties at once. If you poked your head in you could see the business-at-hand between minister and supplicants. It was an order which we soon understood to be inspired by the extreme casualness of the minister herself. It served to establish both the agenda and schedule of her appointments without the need of receptionists, austere doors or paging telephones. The system worked, I am sure, because the

minister had a voice which expressed decorum and commanded a deep respect which people were, in their turn, eager to honour.

The minister was sitting on the carpet leaning an elbow on a plush upholstered footstool, the hand buried in her tousled hair, a knee drawn up as an occasional resting place for the other elbow, and that hand gesticulating wildly on its wrist. She was looking at the TV, a portable colour set with very poor reception, which rested on its stand not more than six feet from her immobile head. The program was All-Star Wrestling. The sound was up quite high -- brash commentary and threatening interviews -- but she had on earphones and appeared to be mouthing a second language, likely following the tape turning in the machine beside her. The cassette was labelled 'Commons & Senate Library', 'The Windhover and other Poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins'. She spoke quietly with her clients, and although she excited them into making blundering, noisy outbursts from time to time, they generally adopted her tone. There was no question that she listened intently to every aural phenomenon about her and assimilated every nuance of data with remarkable speed.

Her large head was inset with a small mouth above a phantom chin whose double hung flabbily well back on the jaw and descended onto a long and skinny neck. It was a comfort that she did not turn her head often but only moved her eyes reluctantly, when necessary, from the television set and

back again.

I perceived that it could be our turn. Both the preceding family of mother and three adult daughters with their husbands and the minister sat in silence for about a minute. She appeared to be intent on their problem, interpreting it through the threatening voice of Killer Kuwalski spitting out his anticipation of meeting current Dutch champion, TenBo Bump, in a quarry full of snakes.

I boldly went to the minister and said, "Hi, I'm Brick, this is my brother Wendel . . ."

The minister got up and moved to a chair beside one of the sofas and stared straight ahead. The large family rose then, without a further word, and moved to the door. I no longer expected a handshake but felt obliged to draw myself in the minister's direction. I sat on the vacated sofa beside her and tried awkwardly to face her at the same time.

"I'm Joe Na Na Nada," she said and paused. No other gesture acknowledged our appearance in her suite and at once I felt our presence here was normal. Of course we could not be welcomed into a place which was ours: our Ministry of State, our office, our moment of influence in the great communal project. Yet, I withered. I looked away and watched Wire approach the minister, bend very close to her ear, nearly kissing her, and mumble several phrases. Then he stepped back and, looking intently into the minister's eyes, reached between his legs for the footstool, pulled it under him, and sat.

"This is my brother Wire," I said, flustered, wondering whether there was still ice to be broken. My notions of protocol were already in disarray. "We would like . . ." but my attempted introduction sputtered.

Wire chimed in when I paused. "We're here to fell the power of the state," he said. "Our markers are on you, the cables ready to convey you to the pulp crusher."

The minister replied immediately, "I like you, Wendel. I got your letter. I consider your project feasible, but if your hostility is directed against my body, there is nothing I can do with it, you understand."

"Yes," Wire shot back. "But I can negotiate nothing! I'll adjust nothing unless or until that hostility, as you call it, agrees. A spirit does what it likes. You are wrong to try and dupe me with the fallacy of control here. One hostility or another's got you by the balls, too, mister."

I was aghast at my brother's approach. At his hostility, of course, but more so because he hadn't told me he'd written to the minister. This pissed me off to the point where I nearly walked out. Obviously I wasn't in on either the language or the intent of this meeting.

So why didn't I laugh? It was crazy. But I couldn't laugh. Nor could I speak. I understood this intercourse less than the sight of a mouse under attack from a well-fed cat; the cat wanting to repeat the sensation of a kill, the mouse willing to remain alive. The aural shock waves in the

air alone were enough to stagger me.

My mind, however, could not wander. I sensed danger. We were far from Wire's bush where the top of any nature tree provides visibility. Here in the minister's office all was RF noise and bright phosphorous confusion to my eyes and ears.

Yet I was hearing a familiar language, too. There were words exchanged between my brother and the minister that I understood to be something I'd always wanted to know.

Wire looked at me several times during the conversation, steadily and long, without interrupting his conquest. I could not understand it myself, but the minister seemed to see his point; began, I thought, to sympathize.

"Alright," she said. "I'll swap you that illusion for one of mine."

The minister rose, crossed the room, and drew a pistol out of a drawer in the wall. She unclipped the safety and fired first into the television. "Testing," I heard through the dizzy ringing sensation of the explosion and simultaneous implosion that reverberated through my head. I was just recovered; that is, back in my seat after I'd jumped to my feet from pure fright, when I noticed the outstretched arm with the gun, the curl of smoke, and behind it the minister's eye and a voice like hers saying, "He's next -- the kid's brain goes the way of the tube unless you guys walk out of here -- now!"

Wire and I walked out, alright. He in fact tore out and

I followed, unbelieving. We startled no one. The offices were entirely evacuated of petitioners, clerks and officials. We stood in the hallway with the solemn portraits that look at you the way you expect they will: bemused. Wire sat on the steps, sweat still beading up on his forehead, but feeling safe. I guessed he was feeling safe because he just sat there, looking at nothing.

Then he said, at long last, "Why would anyone come here? A wasted trip."

I followed Wire up the stairs scowling back at the portraits. I was feeling much safer, myself. We weren't needed. Things were being taken care of.

Wire breaks his promises to Shirley easily. He says, "Sure, Brick. I'll run you over to George's dock. Tell Shil I'll be back tomorrow night. And don't worry about my ride from Edwin's. The bus to town goes by there, or he'll put me up. Anyway, I'll call Shil from there. Tell her the plane has to be taken care of."

Brick has trouble hearing this, himself.

\The toughest dream [hasn't tolerated much manipulation] in which is revealed why and how Brick stuck me with such a sad excuse for a body:

I thought we had a good arrangement. He could deal with the functional stuff, get the body around, fly the planes, run his charter outfit on the radios.

"Talk about scrapin' sky -- I got me the tallest office

in Man-ee-toba. Higher'n Richardson's. Fastest elevator!" he'd say.

People liked him in bars. They'd say 'deranged,' 'gone fishing,' 'cracked.' One night they enjoyed his stupid jokes so much they almost elected him Mayor of Thompson. I couldn't stand him, so I got rid of him, or he me, whatever. Nine-tenths of Brick is gone now, by means of a quite solvable murder which no one will believe. But the tenth that's left of him, namely me, misses the fucker.

I alone understand what happened, maybe Macy. I don't remember how I and the hypothermic body got out of the plane, to shore, and back to the cabin, but we must have, evidently. Simple enough. I do recall building the fire in extreme discomfort, and it was hell here for the first couple of weeks. I still can't figure how a man's body gets along in the world half the time. I have the hang of some of the business now but Brick left some kind of shiver in here because every time I get half an hour of writing done the body's shaking so bad I'm typing junk.

Macy says if I'm not myself by breakup she's going to send a boat and a couple of guys to haul me out to the Oxford House clinic and "fly me to the 'Peg if we have to." It scares me, all this body nonsense. Wants this, wants that, hurts most of the time. I should have had a better start than a swim out of Knee Lake just about to freeze over.

In fact when Brick James presided I took little interest in my own existence. Not until that last ride in Brick's

plane when I decided to kill him. The deed was not really premeditated, not before take off. If I was puzzled by what was to become of me, I didn't know enough about myself to worry. It was just dawning on me that I was the amanuensis of a great writer and here I'd been doing his typing for fifteen years! He would have got nothing down on paper without me, or someone very like me. That and the fact that he dragged me around, disgusted and embarrassed, were reason enough for murder. I knew about murder, what with all the typing. Even if you don't read you pick that up; and handy it is, too. So if there was a plan it was simply to do what I've been doing, or did.

Until December I lived on the fringe of Brick's literary life. I wrote everything, or, I should say typed, and edited a little: his grammar was atrocious. For fifteen years masses of marginless, single spaced pages churned through the platen of the portable or flooded onto the face of this little backlit device. Here it is on my lap, shining for all to see if I'd let them, pausing to save the world every twenty minutes. Only Macy, Brick's daughter, who's been coming to pick up my work, and Deadpan, Brick's mentor, whom I caught looking through the window recently, have seen me at it. I left everything well enough untouched until Search and Rescue, the DOT guy, and the doctors decided to pull out of here. I could understand their consternation at finding Brick's body and me in it. Right after he went down with the plane I was pretty confused.

I couldn't come up with a convincing explanation for those people, coming and going for two weeks.

Brick took us straight towards a bright spot in the Aurora. Tiger, his Cessna 180 equipped with retractable skis, purred as it pulled cold thick slices of moonless night air over tight cylinders. Barely warm, cylinder head temperature less than 105 degrees, the oil ran thick and the bolts refused to give up their white knuckle grip on the machinery. This was climbing out of Thompson Airport last December 8th. "Ski season," said Brick as he dropped Tiger's newly fitted skis into place below the wheels. He tugged at the handle down on the floor, tested the thumb ratchet and pin lock a couple of times, and fastened the safety strap over it. The warm fragrances of hanger grease and aviation fuel disappeared and the cabin filled with frozen and heated air, the scent of stars. Brick said comets were dashing about the wing tips which was very special and rare, but then, he could tell flying stories, oh boy! I didn't see them myself. Then he picked up the clipboard lying on the pack where the second seat used to be and took a look see at his map.

I was along for the ride as usual, uninvited, my presence assumed. But I found myself curious for the first time about Brick's goings on. Brick liked to do a lot of talking as he flew and I listened closely. He was fast becoming a study. I call it that now though these were the first objective thoughts I'd had, or knew, until recently. But

never mind that. If I used to get caught up in his stories from time to time it's just because I couldn't help myself. When you type for a guy as long as I have you begin to participate. Even way back, somehow unconsciously driven, I couldn't stand to see a story go through my fingers without making some contribution. Even if it was just to trip it up a bit, test it for character, see if it was going anywhere. Now I realize it was an urge to tell Brick's story myself. Call it selfishness.

Well, rising through that boreal sky at 3 am last December 8th, I dared to hope that this would be his last trip. Brick had talked little since climbing into the plane and he'd been quite evasive at that. No mention as to where we were headed. Not a word about anything until we lifted off. You see, often he told me too much, too fast, and then he'd drop me, sometimes from thousands of metres, and not pick me up for several days. So when I wasn't being dragged along to a pub or somewhere, I was hanging on to him intentionally, as long as I could, collecting clues that might fill out the story. I was guided by instincts, I guess, towards one day telling everyone about the legendary Brick James. I've been graduating quickly through the stages of self-awareness: scribe, reporter, assassin.

Brick picked up the map and pointed out the yellow highliner blotches with his pen light. "Four a' these're trappers' cabins, kid. Nobody worked'm last year but the price a' fur's up now ain't it. Maybe we'll hole up'n the

one east end a' Knee if the ice is in there, or how about the one at 'The Joint.' Yeah, for sure more comfortable. And what the hell, if the ice is good. Flight plan's filed for Split Lake, then to Gods. Close enough. S 'n' R'll be there soon enough looking for me if I crack up. Most a' the boys know I use it lots, Macy knows."

"Looking for me?" I'm sure that was the line within which my embryonic plan was conceived: the first hint that Brick was about to get himself killed. Everything was new and strange. For one thing, I'd never seen Brick decide, except in an emergency situation, to alter a flight plan after he'd taken off.

He began to get talkative. "Keep notes," he said. "Make a log of this escapade, OK? There, use that clipboard. Fresh paper under the map -- hey, let me look at that business again just for a minute. . . Whoops, trimmed for ploughing here, eh Tiger? Let's get your tail out a' the tamarack and -- that's it -- ease your pretty revolutions down to tweuuuunty-one. Show me that map." This was something. I'd never been asked to do notes before. And in the plane, too! That was a surprise because everything I'd written for Brick as his amanuensis was sitting at a table punching keys in one of his lantern-lit shacks. It was little more than taking dictation. I fixed grammar, punctuated here and there, made glosses to accentuate his emphasis or gestures, and, in general made something readable out of the voice that stamped, whistled, wheezed

and occasionally struck at the usually immovable structures of the cabin surrounding us.

Taking notes in the plane might have meant no more than that he'd refer to them during his dictation, but this was hardly likely. I could not imagine Brick imparting any predetermined structure to his work. The other and terrifying possibility was that he might ask me to write something up from the notes alone, on my own. At the time I was thinking that this could finish me. That is, it could be his excuse to start the lashings again; get drunk and expect words to appear on paper. What appears then is garbage. Several times he took revenge on his fingers by attempting, and often succeeding, to tear apart half-split stove wood with his hands. The beatings were verbal, granted, but noisy, my God, and even now that he's gone my last set of emotional bruises, still a pale black and blue, can cause pain not to laugh at.

It really was him or me; I feel no remorse. But I could never resent Brick for long after these blowups because in less than five minutes his tears of remorse would mingle with mine of submission, sometimes on the same page, and warm feelings of oneness would dissolve our pain away. As a kind of distraction, or was it vengeance, I attempted to type away during these harangues and later the tear-stained pages would celebrate our reconciliation with us, offering up, upon close reading, depths or colour like that of water lilies, white, with roots in magic mud at the bottom of a

lake. Or blossoms of meaning would spring like early bulbs out of painful defrosting topsoil around the trailer soon after the bales are removed. How either of us put up with these fits and starts, literally fits and starts, for so long without getting professional help I'll never know.

Brick just had time to change his mind about me doing the notes. He was actually sweet and mellow his last night. He realized I couldn't manage the typewriter in the plane and as quick as it popped into his mind he dismissed the idea of teaching me then and there to write with a ballpoint. He tried to manage the notes himself by taking the penlight in one hand and the ballpoint in the other, the clipboard balanced on his right knee while the left steadied the column control. One foot was managing the rudder. It didn't work.

It's surprising how a plane has a wandering mind of its own as soon as you take your mind off it. Brick wrote five lines before looking up only to see cockeyed instruments and a horizon angled sharply down to the left. He corrected his course to Split Lake, swearing not at me but because he hated sloppy flying, and then tried just one line at a time. But, too distracted, he gave it up. "What do I want notes for? I can get a damn Walkman if all I want is notes, anyway, you're here," he said.

As always, it made me nervous to be acknowledged.

"Macy! Wait a minute, the squirt," said Brick with a sudden jolt that shook the air. It seemed to wake Venus -

- there she was, blinking -- as if we'd buzzed her bed. "She'll get the manuscripts, won't she? They're property like everything else in a will, eh? Goes to her, jeez, and damn if she burns'm. She'll sell'm already what the hell, the squirt can handle it, where'd I be?

He was right, too. I knew Macy was shrewd. She had business coming in from everywhere this side of the north pole.

Working up from operating radios and booking clients for Brick on weekends when she was twelve, Macy now had up to six bush pilots at a time flying for her. "She can run a trading post from a phone booth for damn sure," Brick confirmed. Her 'booth' however was fairly posh: 840 sq. ft., wall to wall -- emerald green to match her eyes, swivel chair big as the mine boss's in baby blue leather, and one wall stacked with radio and telephone equipment connected to her own transmitting tower on Jerry Hill, up where she has her summer place.

I knew Macy's mother a little. When I started with Brick she was often there in the background, mothering. Later she was more conspicuous moving in and out, between Brick's and her folks in Winnipeg. They knew the right lawyer. "I'm the bastard got the kid in the end," said Brick shivering and pulling on the cabin and carb heat knobs in quick succession. "Turned out she warmed up to her legal counsel who wanted her 'without the boys' as they said he said." They said this because Macy was thirteen at the break up and

she was picking up sexual charms and testing them this way and that. So there were in fact boys coming to see the radios and promising to go into electronics, probably in Winnipeg. Well, excuses or whatever, the advice was to leave the whole set of problems in Thompson, complete. "Thank God what you can't settle in court a lawyer can settle in bed," said Brick. "At least Macy wasn't bounced around like a skidoo in a ditch just when she was most confused." More than once, to get back to Macy the contemporary business woman, buyers on their way to Churchill or Baker Lake or wherever, would find a window in their agenda and go out with her. Several offered her trips to Winnipeg (dinner at the Dubrovnik or Ichiban, dancing at the Rorie Street Marble Club, a room at the Fort Garry) when she needed a lift to Winnipeg; thinking they knew what her emerald eyes were looking for.

"What do you think? Is that sleepy avgasser gonna know what to do with the duffel? Twenty-four kilos of work in there now. Can you believe it? He's no lame brain I figure. Looked at me sideways when I told him I was over and wanted a small drum a' gas instead a' that duffel. 'My side trip special' I told him but he wasn't swallowing it. Probly never saw a bush leave anything behind in a sk' this thick and smooth."

So he had planned to kick. For several days Brick had been gathering his manuscripts into a duffel bag. That was it: Brick was leaving all the manuscripts in one convenient

place and was counting on Macy to know what to do with them while he went and snuffed himself. When I learned this I was indeed curious about my existence.

We'd passed Split Lake without putting down and turned towards God's, maintaining the same altitude. The carb heat was on full but wasn't doing the job. Brick said it felt like ice somewhere in the system. "Might have to set her down, damn. Wanted to see a bit a' dawn down there before we took her in." Hunched seriously forward, he looked over his left shoulder to get a look at the northeast. "Brightning up a' little back there. Lot a' good it does down on the beach, yet." But instead of going down Brick opened the throttle and trimmed the nose up even more. Tiger slowed and began climbing slightly as the engine grunted down to the new demands. "This'll warm her up and maybe get us up out a' this wet rag if that's what we got here." Listening intently for easier breathing up front we climbed a thousand metres and levelled out under better power. The cabin was soon expanding with dawn's white diffusion of light and there, dipping Tiger's now snot-free nose, were the three parts of Knee Lake, white, white, and white.

"What? Froze already? Clean to the middle? I can't believe it. Miles'v it were open last Friday. Must be ice-fog; a' course! Heard'v a guy landed on floats in the stuff once and refused to run the engine for fear a' bending his prop when he hit the shoreline somewhere. Drifted a

day 'cross the Lake and the plane loaded up like a chandelier. Should be enough ice to put her down today, though." Brick said this in his lotto-optimistic dialect which I liked when the sense of excitement hinged on a million but not when it was my existence at stake. We must have shared some foreboding because when we arrived over The Joint, Brick maintained altitude. "Somewhat gloomy below, kid. It's deep along the shore here and maybe the ice isn't real wide yet. I want to get a clear distinction between that fog and the strip when I get down there. Maybe give her twenty minutes. Maybe give ol' Deadpan a wake up."

We flew west and began a descent. Only because I knew it was there, the faint outline of familiar landmarks appeared as we fell upon the dreaming folks at Oxford House. We slipped swiftly through layers of sky, racing the light that was bending down after us. The village began to distinguish itself: geometrical shapes, a tower, buildings, a road, the lighter shade of the airstrip where there were no lights visible, no reason for them. Brick added a lot of noise to our final dip over Deadpan's house and pulled up, sat on the tail as long as possible, and then levelled off. We turned back over town where he dropped a bag of candy as close to the school as he could and then we headed back to Knee, flying low. No doubt a few excitable kids and old men would be yanking doors open in their socks to catch a glimpse of the dive bomber. "You won't see Deadpan. Deadpan'll know it was me. When I think he taught me the whole damn

business. Difference between us is he never gets tired a' hard times."

Brick established his heading over the familiar route and then leaned way back for a morning stretch. "Macy'll get the duffel all right, eh? I wonder if she'll cry one a' those big tears that could fill up a reservoir behind a new dam. Big splash -- and then you hear the boo hoo hoo." He shook himself forward over the controls and had a long intent look at the horizon all around to stretch his neck. "Ordained her 'Saint Squirt,' I did. The girl could preach! That summer coming home from Daily Vacation Bible School? Wrote Bible verses on my cast trying to heal me quicker. God, you know what she'll do? She'll bleed that stuff out to the papers. Twenty years of installments and put the cheques straight into a mortgage on one a' those jacuzzi garden condos in the 'Peg, damn her. She'll run the grain exchange from her bathtub and marry a Richardson, ha!"

The landing went well. The stretch of ice Brick wanted to use lay between the mouths of two creeks, the nearest being thinly covered and the furthest not at all. A pass over the site revealed, between the ice-fog and the snow-covered ice along the shoreline, a narrow black band of new ice which gave Brick the perspective he could work with. "Bugger'll have to stop in a hurry if we're going to pull in here, kid. Think we can groundloop'r before we hit that hole at the end there?" This was not a question. Brick would have pushed on to another site if he'd had

doubts about it.

Brick made his approach along the shoreline and set Tiger down on the thin ice over the mouth of the first creek. He kept the plane's weight on the wings for an instant and then, once over the snow-covered ice, cut power and produced as much drag as possible to slow the machine. A hundred metres from the hole Brick applied full power and swung the bird around. Tiger came to a quick stop and began taxiing in the opposite direction towards the cabin. "Right on the porch. Door to door. Damned if that engine didn't light up for me, hey kid?"

Brick maneuvered up to the shoreline in front of the cabin and swung the tail to point Tiger's nose straight out into the lake. "Let's get your gear inside, kid." 'My gear' consisted of little more than the typewriter and packages of paper. Brick had packed the plane with provisions for a couple months. He carried the things to the cabin and, with some kicking and shoving at the snow around the door, he heaved it open and went in.

Brick placed the typewriter on the table. He tore open a package of paper and inserted a piece into the machine, lining it up to start a paragraph, then lit a fire in the stove. "You take over from here, kid. You know what to do? You got everything you need?" He yanked open a cupboard to display the supplies, verify to all concerned that they were there, available, intact.

Then he sat down at the typewriter and awkwardly, with one

finger, produced a page of his own which he then tore from the machine and signed. I reproduce it here without the typos but the syntax and punctuation are intact:

This, Benjamin Brick James, that is, called Brick James, my last will and testament, gives everything to Macy my daughter except the food and fuel caches on the map give to Cob, Macy knows him, and except the typewriter leave here for (here were a lot of crossed out attempts to name me, I think) whoever wants it. And permission to publish my work and proceeds go to Macy who can manage everything.

Then, a few lines down:

Macy, I love you. God what a prize you were. Good-bye, I love you.

He signed it boldly with the ballpoint: Benjamin B. James, and placed it on a shelf under a pot. "OK, you should be all right. I couldn't have done all that . . . filled that duffel, I mean. Sooo, thanks. Bye. I don't know why I'm doing this."

He quickly left the shack and headed for the plane. I followed him.

Tiger, still warm, fired up on the first crank and Brick jumped in. The engine leapt to full throttle. He never touched the controls and I don't think Tiger ever lifted off before entering the ice-fog sixty metres from shore. At

that point I jumped. I remember hearing the engine slow, pulling harder and harder, while Tiger must have skied out over the lake for awhile. That was the end of Brick, for all intents and purposes, as the lawyers are finding out I gather. The lake froze over.

Back in the cabin I found myself in Brick's painful wet body and none too pleased. I'm slowly getting myself warmed up and I'm trying to get some work of my own done. Brick needn't have bothered with the provisions there's been so many planes and snowmobiles in and out. Quiet now though. Macy is good to me, coming around to check up once a week. My existence is still confusing, but, you know, a comfortable confusion. Aside from her everyone is very cold and skeptical. I don't ever want to leave this place, see anyone, type.

Spit from the bow wave trickles and freezes into beads on the shiny gunnels. The boat slows for some shattered panes of drifting ice and pushes through. With a twist of her wrist Mitts opens the throttle and the low sounds in the engine grumble and disappear beneath the high whine of top speed. Water drums on the metal boat skins: rhythm section behind the drone of the well-tuned Evinrude; talking drums and sitar on the way to George's dock.

As they approach the wave-slapped and gurgling tires nailed to the deck plate, Brick waits for the bump, then grabs a cleat, jumps out of the boat and holds it.

"Watch your fingers," says Mitts.

Wire reaches him the car keys and ten dollars, then shoves off. "For gas and lunch, kid. And if you're going over to our place tonight, try and stop at the florist and pick up some irises."

Mitts waves. The motor never slows for any ice. Their prop spins a line of white emulsion and tracks it through the chop. Gas stains bob on the water around the crib pilings and the vapours fly before the pine, sun and rock-cleaned wind. A trace of high jets lingers in the jet stream.

\UPLoad Peter

\PLUMBING - Quick Fix

*T Leaks

*CAP Damaged Faucet Valve Stem [re/symptom: knob turns but will not open or close water supply]:

*P1 Obtain a replacement knob with set screw fasteners.

- loosen the set screws as necessary and place the knob onto the damaged valve stem.

- tighten the set screws with a hex key.

- don't overtighten. The set screw or its housing are easily stripped.

TIP: insert the long side of the allen key into the screw head and apply the twisting force to the short side to increase your control over the hex key torque.

- following the initial tightening manipulate the knob several times and retighten. Repeat this process several times as necessary.

- if, as often happens, these set screw knobs fail to perform for long and you still haven't got around to replacing the valve assembly, just remember it's a quick fix, only one of many.

*P2 Use a small, inexpensive vice grip.

- firmly clamp it to the damaged valve stem.

- wrap tape around the release lever to prevent its accidental removal or to discourage vandals from stealing it in public facilities.

*EndCap

\ready QFX_2289.PL2

George is back in the shop but he comes around and lets Brick into the store to make a couple of calls. Brick dials June's number and realizes too late, just as her mother picks up the phone, that it's Friday and she'll still be at school for the afternoon.

Mrs. Rempel's voice scrambles Brick's telephone desires for her daughter; that is, he feels dizzy and his arguments for durable love break open and expose for a horrible minute the confusion of his loyalties and unfocused objects of sexuality.

"Sorry, I wasn't sure of the time. I'll call back later. She's not here, no. No, I'm not at school, myself. I'm up

north. Up at the lake where my brother keeps his plane. I had to drive him because of freezeup . . . right. Yes, my brother, Wendel. That's right."

"Shirley! It's Brick. I'm still at George's but on my way to town now. Wire can't get out until tomorrow. He'll be coming from Edwin's tomorrow afternoon at the latest. He said to tell you."

"To tell me. Right. Thanks, Brick. Thanks for calling. Oh, can you still come for supper, with June? Bring her! Yes! Well, if she's free. Ask her anyway. Don't worry! I promise to avoid the topic. C'mon Brick, trust me. I've got all this good food and no one to share it with. Good. Ok, seven or eight -- eight's better, the kids are ready for bed. They'll want a kiss from their favorite uncle and his girl. Ok, Ok.

Brick checks the oil and radiator and spins out of George's gravel yard up onto the road and across the wood plank bridge. Daylight has drained the muskeg of its hospitable black symbols. Its sea of grasses move, water spiders walk on its water face: a flat neglected melancholic face facing the sunny sky. Below that, where sunlight vanishes, where there's a grave twitching attachment to the planet, in that busy leaping murk, light nourishes life. And below that, the rock-hard shell riding the molten mix, oxygen-free, keeping the longest memories, warmest muscles; releasing the comfortable methane of middle age through relaxing sphincters; answering deep riddles.

Brick awoke in stages early one Saturday morning in March. The light at the window was too bright and for an instant he thought he'd missed his wake-up call for school. But the fears and responsibilities of grade two could not hold his attention and Brick quickly recovered the identity of his dream. He was Drifter on a silent snowmobile speeding through the trees and listening to the soft trickle of water in the creek beside his track. Mounds of snow billowed above deep crevasses where the water ran.

Then he was fully awake, resolute. It was Saturday. The light at his bedroom window had an opaque intensity which streetlights alone could not produce without new, luminescent snow. Things were all set. He could be up and out of the house and on his way before anyone noticed.

Drifter knew what to do. He slipped out from under the warm caribou skins and pulled on long underwear, two wool sweaters, an old pair of wool pants which bunched up as he cinched them with a belt. There would be heavy socks, leather mitts and wool liners, and moccasins with dry insoles by the back door.

He went downstairs and in the dim interior of the kitchen tried to imagine a cabin snowed in above the windows. He lit the fire with one press on the sliding switch and made toast. Butter and honey dripped over his fingers. Between intervals of hot jumping toast he made sandwiches, wrapped them in cellophane and stuffed them into his parka pockets.

Then Brick scooped a nearly full bowl from the puffed wheat bag. Brick poured milk slowly over cereal and stopped at the precise moment the puffs threatened to ride over the edge. He sprinkled sugar onto them and cupped his hands down over the puffs to sink them into the milk. Milk rose to the brim and puffs tried to escape through his fingers. He held them, waited, and raised his hands. He was skilled with a spoon, too. No spills. The final reward was warm sugary milk at the bottom of the bowl. He stirred up the sweet sludge and gulped it down in one hand-held draught. Then he put the milk back in the fridge, pulled on socks, moccasins, mitts, toque and parka and quietly opened the door into the garage to get the snowshoes.

Last night's wind had blown snow through cracks under the loose fitting garage door and built a small drift against the kitchen door. Brick stepped over the delicate, razor-sharp threshold into the garage and gently closed the door again. He looked over to the far wall where the old snowshoes had hung as long as he could remember. The milky green Buick stood just inches from the wall and Brick had to climb from the bumper to the door handle and grab at nails in the studs which held extension cords, garden hose, a lawn chair and other relics of disuse in order to reach the snowshoes. One of them was cracked at the tail and the other was bandaged with a mass of hockey tape around the nose. Brick had never used them. They lifted easily off the nail, bounced on the car roof and clattered onto the

cement floor.

The harnesses that appeared to be a tangle of dry, frozen leather began to co-operate in his hands. Brick put the snowshoes on beside the car and stepped tentatively into the shallow drift that just covered the cement and part of the welcome mat near the door. As a waffle iron pattern of snow rose through the catgut a quick sensation of adventure flashed into Brick's imagination. He was ready. He lifted the multi-panel sectional garage door high enough to squeeze out under it, then pushed it down slowly while his eyes adjusted to the intense light. Brick sweep-stepped tentatively along the ice-paved street towards the edge of town and didn't fall. Where new snow had gathered above the dirty hard-pack his skidding feet kicked it up like fluff and the lazy dawn wind regathered it into a blotchy swirled pattern of water dropped paint further downwind. The ice gave way to gravel when he reached the T-junction with Town Line Road and Brick heard the scraping rattle of stones under the snowshoes. He stood on the far side of the raised roadbed and the land stretched flat and far before him. Getting this far was easy but Drifter was going to the bush today, a very long way.

Brick stood on the shoulder, his back to the town, and waited for a car to pass. The car ground by, spit stones, and kicked up dust into a long cloud which the wind rolled over him, over the ditch and deposited onto the nearly new snow of the field before him. The ditch would provide the

first test for the snowshoes he had persisted in wearing like an idiot along the hard street that led from his house to Town Line Road.

Just before he jumped down into the wind-carved hollows Brick caught a glimpse through the dissipating dust of the far edges of his landscape. He felt the immensity of his advantage in height over the rest of the world and he could see fields outlined in the pencil-lines drawn by fences and roads. Thicker darker pencils drew the tree-surrounded farms and stubby willow-fringed dugouts. Beyond these, and a bit to his left, were the tiniest grain elevators and church of the next village. The steeple threw a grey glint into the grey-white background, a just noticeable difference. A mile or so to his right his eye met the bush which began as a heavy impenetrable line of vertical strokes which continued north and then crossed, ever finer, into the horizon and disappeared directly ahead of him.

Brick jumped but the tails of his snowshoes failed to clear the rim of the snow-sculpted ditch. He pitched forward into deep soft snow; a comic tangle of limbs without leverage at the bottom of a canyon. Twisting onto his back Brick freed his arms and legs. He could see nothing but sky beyond the white edges of his trench, dazzling white and silent, until he felt as much as heard the muffled gravel sounds of another car. A stone bounced into his hideaway and landed on his parka. No one knew he was here. No one would find him if he fell asleep.

Brick got up and found a place to climb out of the ditch. He clambered up and out onto the first field. The snow was deep only along a narrow band next to the ditch where it had collected among uncut grass, a blade of which rose out of the sheltering crust here and there, bent or broken, and dove back underneath. In the field he had to take awkward, staggering steps to find enough snow to step on.

But Brick was determined to get to the bush by snowshoe. He soon gave up his zigzag search for a path that would keep him stepping on increasingly scarce deposits of new snow and abandoned himself to last week's dirty crust, pocked with jagged black clumps of ploughed-up stubble, and aimed straight for the next section road. He bumped and scraped over the exposed knobs of earth. The pressure of them hurt through his moccasins but he felt the ache as embarrassment for the snowshoes.

A mile of this and Brick reached a low section road, unploughed, and, across it, the start of a thick highway of drifts stretching along a fence line that crossed the next field. He stepped eagerly onto the waves of snow that buried the road. Finally he would be making real use of the snowshoes. Only the far side of the ditch was not entirely blown over. Here and there the surface sank away to reveal bulrushes and the tops of weeds. Brick chose the widest, most secure looking snow bridge and crossed easily over to the drifts that shrouded a fence line. He climbed onto the nearest ridge where the snow covered the highest strand of

barbed wire and looked along the fence. Most of the nearby posts were visible, the twisted black filament rising out of the snow to meet them. Further along, the fence became a jagged black mark, and further, a fine black wire itself that disappeared into the line of trees where his adventures waited for him.

At first Brick tried to stay above the fence as much as possible, clambering from one ridge to the next but soon found himself walking along the lowest part of the drift where he could avoid the humped backs that were alternately hard as cement or too soft to support his weight. It had been all the more frustrating because he couldn't tell by appearance where the snow would support him and where it would let him sink. So he walked along the edge of the drift where it was just deep enough to disguise the shape and feel of the black knobs of earth underneath.

He felt good. The wind was cool on his back. Lazy wisps of snow caught up with him, climbed the drift, curled around the tops of fence posts and slid into the adjacent field.

Brick stopped, crouched, and dropped his mitts onto the front of his snowshoes. He pulled his cheese sandwich out of a pocket and worked at the cellophane wrap. The lump in his hand no longer resembled the warm limp slices of bread and cheese he had put together. His teeth went through hard, ice-cold bread and then slowly through the cheese. He tasted mustard as the pieces fell apart in his mouth, and sandwich tastes emerged only if he let a bite sit in his

mouth for a minute. He got thirsty and dropped to his knees to scoop his mouth full of snow but tiny black insects nestled in the rough porous surface stopped him. They were everywhere. He scraped a spot free of them and took a handful of snow into his mouth without examining it further. What he really needed was the creek where he could plunge his head into a clear cold pool hidden under banks of snow.

Brick stood up and took out his compass. He put his hands back into his mitts and watched the needle spin. He thought it would line up with the fence but it stopped slightly off to the right where, sighting along it, his gaze entered the line of trees. Brick turned his eyes instead to follow the direction of the wind and noticed the church rising out of the ragged silhouette of the village. The steeple, larger, an overbuilt monument of strength against the frivolous wind. Dropping the compass into a pocket, Brick began to concentrate, head down, on a leaping running stride, edging closer to the bush that held his secret creek and cabin.

Running on snowshoes was technically easy but Brick stopped suddenly, out of breath. The line of trees merging on him from the right broke into distinct parts; large trees, small ones, thick clumps of willow, clearings. Contours of snow near the trees transgressed the field's ritual plane and drew the land down towards the unseen creek. Brick knew the creek was in there, somewhere, running under the snow.

As Brick's eyes darted along the winding edge of the bush

choices emerged. Where would he go in? Where would the cabin be? What if Drifter were there? Far along the treeline he saw something. Or had he? Yeah, there! A jack-rabbit raced from the open field and into the bush. Beautiful, he thought. How they fly from one imperceptible touchdown to the next. A spontaneous shiver nudged him and he took a step up the bank on his left towards a fencepost.

Following the fence Brick could see he would merge with the winding treeline near the end of the section. Not the most direct route. If he wanted, Brick could dash across more earth-pocked sheets of thin dirty snow and be there in a minute.

Brick hesitated, looked back at the fencepost, then scrambled up the drift towards it. He wanted to step onto the post top, wave his arms and balance, but a toe caught under a crust of snow and put him off balance before he reached it. Instead he was forced to make an arching turn and come running around in quick little steps back to his starting point. Then, without looking back, Brick buckled at the knees and fell onto his back into the circle.

The pale light above welcomed him, absorbed and dissipated his fears. He wanted to see more of it. He wanted to rise into it. He wanted one undiminished expanse of light; no treeline, no fence, not a stick or filament to betray him to the world.

His enormous snowshoes lifted off the snow as he raised his shoulders and then Brick banged his head back deeper

into the snow. He was determined to get a fisheye view of the sky, all of it, without a trace of the bush that fell away quickly with the horizon as his head dropped back into the crusty edges of a growing depression. He looked steadily at the white sky and began to remember uncle Gord's story; the fish lying flat on the ice, one eye staring up, freezing.

Brick soon found himself among layers of colour. This time he was a layer of atmosphere himself, jostling for position, arranging at will his blue into the white schematic. He moved effortlessly among the colours, pushed and prodded them, and confused the layers. When he particularly liked the effect he tried to stop and fix it like a developing photograph. But it always disappeared.

A tiny intruder appeared from the right side of Brick's shifty sky. A silhouette at first, a running figure whom he thought he should know. It ran along the planes of colour, jumping from one to the other as they appeared in front of it. It grew and Brick finally recognized his own shape: running and jumping and growing ever faster. A mottled ball popped into existence ahead of him and came rolling towards him, across his path. He wanted to kick it but the ball veered away and descended rapidly trying to escape. Brick leaped down after it and made his leg grow long. It was his good kicking leg, the right one, and it grew faster than the ball could fly. With all his strength he swung the foot at the receding ball.

Silently, because this dream was never audible, Brick saw the ball vanish into the distance. Before it did, however, he glimpsed the beginning of a split. Brick knew that the blow had been a good one and that the earth would shatter into millions of pieces. He was left without a world in empty space; wide awake with no more interest in the sky.

After crossing the bridge Brick pulls over to wash the windshield with a bucket of water from the creek. The trunk opens to his key and he lifts out his wash bucket. He throws the hose, brush nozzle, soap-filled steel wool pads and the chamois tied into a plastic bag back into the trunk and keeps the sponge. The creek flows out of the muskeg to merge with the oxygen-sucking, life form-refining, float plane and boat-bearing water in Lake Two Lakes. Brick hangs the bucket out in front of him, heel-dredges down the loamy bank, and perches on the flattest rock in the smooth stream. He dips his bucket and takes it up to the car, sponges all the glass, and splashes a rinsing splash from the bucket against each window. Static jumps from the speakers as the frequency indicator crosses the radio and Brick switches it off. He places a half bag of sunflower seeds beside him on the bench seat, rolls down his window and pulls back onto the road heading for town.

It was several weeks after God had moved into Brick's trailer court that Brick realized she had a crush on him. The idea of God living next door disgusted him, but already she was friends with his sister and there was nothing he

could really do. He tried polite distance but it wasn't working. Staple soon noticed his discomfort and decided to tell him: "She thinks you're gorgeous. And this cold shoulder strategy of yours only provokes her amours." So he thought he'd beat her at golf, round after round if necessary, to put her off. But she beat him -- nine rounds so far. She's unrelenting. Brick decided to think of her as ugly and disgusting, but she's beautiful. He said he'd rather move across town than submit to this love. Would that work he wondered? Escape God? Every prophet has tried and failed. Now me.

He'd hang out with her if she showed up, or if they happened to share the same company, but Brick decided to let her take any initiative in their relationship. Brick could expect that from God at least. Half leaning against the passenger door she watched him with eyes that shifted from him to the road and back. God's eyes are dark: Spanish, he thought. She watched his fingers placing seeds one at a time into his mouth where they were deftly turned and delicately caught, base and tip, between the smooth tips of his incisors. The shells split, their treasure tongued into one cheek or the other, and then with a barely perceptible twitch of abdominal muscles under Brick's shirt, they flew from a fleeting pucker of his lips and gathered around his wet cuffs and boots on the floor. Brick's tongue wiped across his salty lips, and her tongue, empathetic, wetted her lips. "Ola," she said darkly, warm like blood: like

Spain.

"That's what you hear, isn't it," inquired Brick, "when you're a bull, bloody and confused. There's that warm, welcome steel flash over your shoulder and then your knees buckle?"

"No, no: it's 'hello.' 'Hi Brick.' That's all." God's large black drop-rimmed hat was giving her trouble against the sedan pillar, tipping up or down as she tried to position her head for comfort. "Masturbate for me, Brick," she demanded in winsome tones.

"I thought you'd want to talk to me about my salvation one of these days, Lord."

"Oh you must have me confused with someone else," she replied. "You have a beautifully smooth and sculpted penis, Brick, when it shapes up."

"Have you seen it?"

"No," said God. "I keep imagining it. I made the first one with some difficulty and the rest are copies. Let me see what your oversized hands can do with it."

"I might have a spasm, go blind and drive off the road," Brick protested, but he unzipped and brought the fish out. It just lay there along the fly seam of his bluejeans.

"See! It is pretty. At least by itself: the back of it so smooth, finless, spineless. Did you know it once had a bone? How could you. We had it attached to another more complicated bone structure something like a wrist. There were two bones actually, like a finger but with an up and

down joint at the base and a fairly large knuckle with a ball socket just behind the glans. Had its own sort of biceps. Adam could send the first woman into these absolute fits of laughter because all the muscles were voluntary. He could exercise and do tricks. Writing in snow was more eloquent, then; lovemaking more athletic."

Brick's penis, a little grown, began to roll around to the left revealing a shiny nipple skinned seam (repair seam from bone removal) that formed a straight lasagna-bordered path towards the foreskin. There it turned sharply left, narrowed, spiraled over the onion dome and disappeared into its elastic lip still neatly bunched at the tip. "Let me guess. You removed the bones because you couldn't get those two apart long enough to do any gardening. All they had to worry about was blisters? Or was that it: they'd sustain their ecstasy too long without a break and wind up with painful abrasions?"

God couldn't resist and leaned across to touch it. Her hat fell off and landed on the bench seat between her and Brick. Brick's penis leapt into her approaching fingers, a familiar friend. She gripped it with the tips of her fingers near the tip, where the socket used to be, and pulled the skin towards the tip and back as far as it could stretch in each direction. She looked at the sliding vesselled sheath, nearing it with her talking tongue and lips: "Yes, that was actually part of a complex situation. We decided to revise the concept for human males: make

ejaculation voluntary and tie erection to sexual pleasure. You see, as it was Adam was ejaculating, if you can call it that, once a day on average; without warning and without time to plant it inside Eve. So it leaked down his leg onto the ground or into the sheets or wherever ninety-nine times out of a hundred. Eve was happy with her body from the first so her ovulation cycle wasn't altered; same then as now. To make a baby the daily spawning Adam had to be in position within the vagina of ovulating Eve when, unannounced, his sperm would flood out of him. Most nights, ovulating or not and out of habit as much as any baby-making obligation, the two of them slept attached. When awake they slipped and slid in and over each other, caressing and rolling in the moss. It looked like fun, and so they reported, but we all eventually had to admit it was a bit diversionary and pointless; something to do while you wait, like shopping for new machinery and extended credit in spring, waiting to get back onto the frozen land.

Brick doesn't want to stop but he's already passed some eastern Manitoba farms and remembers that there's a gas station coming up. He needs gas and a phone.

God sensed the shift in concentration and suggested they pull off into a field and she'd get on him lying along the bench seat. "You don't mind if I take it inside me, do you? You've been rock hard for an hour: I think you should unload it now or you'll have wasted all that carefully stoked blood pressure." Brick drove the car across one of the field

access crossings and along a narrow trail behind a peat embankment that paralleled the road.

They stopped between a ditch full of bulrushes and a fenced, poplar filled pasture. God pulled him down rather roughly. Her stiff-rimmed hat crunched under his back and her knee pinched his skin at the ribs as she brought her beautiful black-skirted ass down and took him in with a gasp. Whenever the pounding slowed Brick took a deep breath and moved his head off the window crank and back onto the arm rest.

"We linked Adam's arousal directly to the feelings he liked to feel at his penis. But those feelings were not strictly defined, somewhat unspecific, and he was trying out his new toy all over the place. Eve and I had to design a curriculum for her and Adam to learn and test a whole range of associated touch, smell, sound, taste and visual sensations that would help him perform with her more often. That worked out alright: they had more kids and more fun, too."

Losing interest Brick arched his back and neck to look at the large animals, domestic and game, that reached their long necks over the barbed wire and licked the windows.

At sixty-five on fresh gravel Frick holds the wheel with his knee and zips up, happy to pack phallus and scrotum away without a mess this time. The station comes up sooner than he anticipates and he turns in at the further driveway, parks in front of the pumps, and nods to the attendant on

his way to the washroom to wash genital dew off his hands .
Near freezing water falls from one tap. The other, dry,
needs more than a knob because the originally ridged top of
the valve stem is reamed smooth, probably by injudicious use
of a Vicegrip. The skin of countless washings layers the
rim of the sink basin, shit pocks and streaks the toilet .
More of it bunches at the bottom of the dry bowl. Brick
thinks the toilet water supply probably froze: can't always
think of everything in time. He rubs his hands under the
water and goes around to the back of the garage to piss .
He pisses into a reed filled drainage ditch; listens to the
urine stream hit ice and cut through. He imagines froth
spilling over the ice from the gurgling hole.

\EDN

Dear Edna,

Maybe it's only the technical writer who can describe God
anymore. A durable theology has always had to deliver a lot
of loose ethical options and rational escape routes in order
to keep its life and literature in production. One of
course thinks back on the bishops and imams, who, perched
on the carrion of failed religions, taught the reasonable
limits of love to foaming, heaven-bound bounty hunters (ca .
16th c.). But today's spiritual marketeers know this, too ;
none better than North American churches whose guidance
can't be distinguished from the moral comfort, leadership
excellence, and investment security tips found in last

week's Royal Bank Letter. It seems to be getting more difficult to pray to a just God knowing your Retirement Savings Plan could be earning .75% more at the Credit Union. 75% disparities in local income used to improve the turnout at prayer meetings, and 750% was the positive test for poverty in "Guidelines for grants" to third world development projects (they don't have to heat their homes). What happened? The sleaze and terror theologies we used to count on to make sense out of this have been reduced to evangelical television and the occasional Boeing flight recorder. Are there still butter-knifed snipers in the tall grass prepared to outwit the old guns and money and restore true religion?

I think God needs a troubleshooting chart to keep up with us. We've spent forty centuries pondering the Ten Commandments but my computer (Peter's) runs at 4 million instructions per second (MIPS). Not a fair comparison, but even so, four millennia of biblical interpretations would probably fit on a few floppy disks. I think it's time to swallow hard and go high tech. Calculate everything. Chop off capitalism's invisible hand. Count all the fingers in all the pies: it won't take a minute. Pass the pie and count again. We could appoint some people to serve tables while others devote themselves to monitoring the chart. The most beautiful digital art is produced by the simple formula for chaos. Money is a number in memory; cash a printout: nobody with money has to be cold and artless.

Surely such a troubleshooting chart will be portable: take it anywhere and everywhere, instantaneous goodness and mercy all the days of your life. It'll allow no structural imports or exports without recalculating all the numbers in every ecosystem. So, no solutions, no totals, no conclusions: calculations might pause but never end; all formulas suspended in solution. And we? What or who will we be, Edna? 1) nomadic monads? 2) system termites (bugs) tunneling out of every new construction? 3) none of the above/below? 4) colonizers in air? What's the problem? Let the machines observe us; we'll watch them.

Sorry, Edna. I get belligerent. Whenever I think I'm on to something, out pops a quiz and teacher's guide for further discussion.

\and stupid apologies

\start again LTR_1389.EDN

Brick makes his call but he and Mrs. Rempel remember at the same instant that June is probably at the curling rink. He calls the curling rink: can she come to the phone? no, she's on the ice; can she call him? no, he's on the road at a pay phone; can he make it before the end of the match? well, they're in the second end now; so, yeah, easily.

Before Brick gets to the paved highway the floor of the Comet is already nicely covered with a mat of sunflower seed shells. He wants to whistle but his lips are wrecked and his tongue sore. He tastes blood. The car jolts onto the

pavement. Wire said not only the suspension system but the vehicle's frame will twist out of shape when you hit a large bump or go into a skid and then what happens is the idler arm, stabilizer bar and tie rods receive your input through the steering mechanism and from the forces transferred through the tire rubber and everything together tries to fight this harmonic flex and redirect the car. This is why chassis engineering is such an art; nothing's totally predictable. In fact its easier to argue for the impossibility of a car ever going where you want it to. This is why they should go back to making all these parts out of wood.

Brick ties a knot in the seed bag and throws it into the back seat to stop himself from completely mutilating his mouth. He tries the radio: still nothing reliable. He feels happy, very happy and begins picking at the cuticle on the inside corner of his thumbnail. The nail on his ring finger is sharp and digs repeatedly at the white scallop lifting from the brightening tissue about it. Brick, responding to a prick of pain, takes his eyes off the misbehaving centre line, and notices what he's done. Generally he salvaged live skin by working the tear from the outside toward the nail but he can't do this with a fingernail on the same hand, and he couldn't risk elbowing the Comet along the highway. Nor can he stop picking, so the flap of skin grows. He sucks it and residual salt from the seeds transfers from his tongue to the open nerves.

Harder sucking and lip pressure relieves some of the pain. Brick cuts at the base of the filet with his incisors but manages only to snip into its tip and start more blood. The blood tastes foul and so he places the damaged thumb between his knees for pressure, but the maneuver reduces his speed. Since he no longer has the revs for third he risks bleeding on the stick and changes gears. Then, like a species of fish drawn to the vibrations of struggle or the scent of blood, somebody is there again, in the back seat. Brick imagines it's God in black bikini underwear, hat and heels, humming along with the humming rubber: back up to cruising speed the tires hummed a steady number and fired stones at the chassis to the rhythm of a six-and-a-half bar blues.

total is zotal

total is all

but if total is all gone to hell, man [like Janis]

where's total gone?

total is scrotal

total is lit

but if total is all gone to hell, man

where was it?

totum is mottum

totum is dumb

but if totum is all gone, man

how come?

"Take it all off, Brick," demanded God, sultry, "and throw it back here."

"What? Now you want my skin? What for?"

"Just do it."

Brick forgot the pain and pulled eagerly at his skin. A quick yank fairly popped it off the end of his thumb, then he peeled the finger sheaths back to his wrist one at a time. These he wrapped around the wheel and held while he pushed his beautiful shining arm out of the fuzzy skin through to the shoulder. With sharp nails he sliced and grabbed the skin off the other arm and the rest of his torso. The closest analogy Brick could think of was trying to get out of a snowmobile suit while keeping the car on the road. He'd seen it done in a half ton and it proved not impossible here. Finally he kicked the last of it, tattered but still in one piece, off his accelerator foot while maintaining speed with the other and kicked it over to the passenger side of the floor. He was able to shake off most of the shells and then fling it into the back. Looking in the rear-view mirror he realized he'd forgotten his head but that snapped off in one easy tug at the scalp. Brick tossed it back, too.

"You needn't have done that," said a voice like Xed's.

Brick readjusted the mirror. There sat Pazzi, Su, and Xed between them, the skin draped across the naked bodies of all

three.

"Hi, Brick. We're the angels," explained Xed. "You are quite the entertainer!"

"What did you want with my skin?" Brick demanded, fluctuating between the irritation of having gone to all that trouble for three grade ten students and the more immediate embarrassment if they really were angels. "Just to get under it?"

"Yeah, and to see your face when you finally noticed. Here, put this back on."

Brick pulled his face and scalp back over his head and smiled. "Thanks," he said. "So what sort of response did we get to Thursday's issue?"

He drives happily, skinned and shiny down to his toes. When he gets to town he finds June at the rink and watches her team complete its match, conceded by their opposition after seven ends. Xed is there with Pazzi, whose rink finished the draw on another sheet even earlier. They want to go to the city. June arrives and they stand aside, nudging and shuffling against each other. June doesn't want to go to Shirley's but agrees to go for pizza. They all get in and take the car to the city. Brick is tired; forgets to call Shirley, thinks driving-into-headlights thoughts: sweeping, blinding, momentary, gone. June is sullen; hardly speaks. The highway appears motionless beneath vaporous, writhing, skin-deep snow making its own way to the city, blown by a lazy, indecisive tail wind. On city streets they

watch the city's lights; reflecting ice drifts under the car. June's pale face shines red in the brake light.

Mixed curling, the four of them, hopes riding. Skip throws last rock in the tenth end. Ice has been hard to read all night. Brick wants good weight: clear the guard, bump their counter, roll and stick in the four-foot for a win. A step van at the top of the intersection where the road dips under the CN overpass stops for a red light right in front of them and Brick's at the hog line already committed to take-out weight. With the last touch of his fingers on the Comet, reading ice, Brick puts a left turn into the stone -- Damn. Call off the sweepers! He puts the blue '64 four-door sideways, applies gas, gets traction and squeaks by the truck, sliding through the intersection in the opposite lanes. An Olds Vista Cruiser has a green light, white headlights. The white light approaches, arrives at the blue paint, the glass, the centre post, June gripping upholstery. Collapsing vehicle structures make a machine mess of June's body, Xed's legs. He should never have tried this. He should have drawn to the button for a tie, extra ends. Brick tugs at her once or twice, her pale face red, off and on. "Take-out weight. We win!" But he hears nothing more of the incident, no one talks about it; of brighter lights, louder sirens. "Take-out weight!" he tells her, explaining the strategy, anticipating the score.

Now when I drive the Comet -- totalled, needless to say -
- I always see God or the kids in the carcasm with their

jabbering and nonsense. June never shows up. It's too difficult to think of her and God in the same car but whenever I pray for June I still imagine, toties quoties, someone to talk to.

\Oxford Digital: LOOKup mode

\Type word and press RETURN to display definitions; press CTR-P to PAUSE screen display; press CTR-R to RESUME scrolling; press ESC to end search and reset LOOKup mode.

\Word: toties quoties[HRT]

\adv. on each occasion, every time, as often as[CTR-P]

The siren wavered near the top of its range and the school bells clanged: four seconds, six seconds (it won't be recess), ten seconds (it's not lunchtime), longer. Some of us rose, alarmed by the mid-morning wail of the town's siren, and sat down again under the teacher's glare. We all stood together, eyes on her flat hands lifting the world easily onto another shelf. I managed to get behind Rita, my true love in grade two and three, when the lines formed. We were whisked through the door into the hallway and assigned space along the cement block walls. Along with the rest of the children we were instructed to sit against the wall with our foreheads on our knees. I didn't know what to do with my hands. Rita put hers over her ears and I got to nudge her when it was time to stand and go back to our lessons.

\Next word Y/N: Y

\toto caelo

\adv. by an immense amount (differ toto caelo), by the whole
heaven.

\Next word Y[ESC]