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Photocopies from the Rural States

Diana Brawley

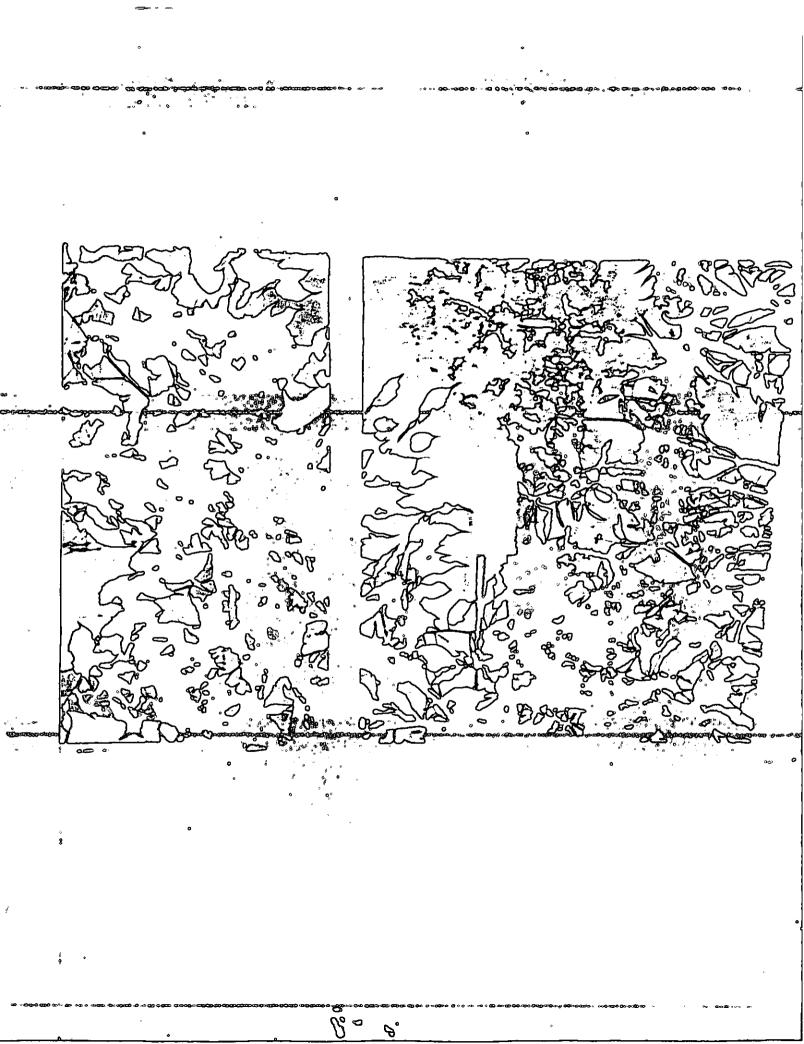
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Sometime in April:

My mother

thinks that God sent her to Iowa. My sister

would say that morality will be the downfall of man. But she lives in a trailer with the only man she ever had sex with, and huge mutant sunflowers raise their heads over her roof. And she is moral. She must have said it to get at our mother. She must have meant twisted morality. I -- disproved God -- try not to believe in it because I don't believe in sin. Yet, I find it symbolic that two years ago when I kneeled on the bathroom floor with my hands in the air and begged for someone to help me, to pull me up off my knees, you were suddenly there. And you'd been there all along, watching me, staring right into my face, and thinking that aside from reason, aside from you not knowing me, that I must be needing you. You must be right about your intuition.

And I find it symbolic that now when for two days I've sat up on the roof and thought how much I like to see the light of day, and how cold you like it when you can sit in all day and learn from 400 pages and four walls nothing more than what nature itself has already endowed you with, and I want to be free, I come to you. And you tell me that although I'm right that you've picked up-your handful of sand and called it the world, the nature of sand is always the same and we can't just let people live how they choose without saying a word, our minds as open as hellicopter seeds plunging into water. Human responsibility. And for that reason, this is an unfortunate time to be a romantic, in a huge crowded world of individuals spreading diseases and escaping into the responsibility of only one's own simple happiness. And your simple range of beliefs in what is right and wrong encompasses the whole spectrum of the world. And I believe you. --But I have to be what you hate. I have to be like jello to watch a man with Kierkegaard in his lap and Geist licking his feet, a man who I want to marry right after college even after all my life I swore against that sheltered step. A man who wants babies and kennels full of dogs, and snow on the ground. And most of all a person who believes in right and wrong and cut and dry and stoicism. And I grew up believing that morality would be the downfall of man, with a mother who thinks that God sent her to Iowa. I have to be jello to believe in you, to wrench myself from a life that was so my own I'd have died for nothing. --Today an old friend walked by me. We were both in jeans, our flannels tied round our waists and our pale arms hanging from our sockets. He's also been here in this whirlwind sucking college town for as many years as I have, and we've seen summers so fun our skin turned black -

and we became like pieces of the sky, the hot fallen rays of the sun, and in all irony this friend said to me — happy summer. — I have had all I ever wanted, and now I have to get over it, to place myself back in the mind of a thirteen year old child locked in the bathroom, realizing for the first time that the most ethical thing she could do so as not to damage the world was die. She was a child who had no idea one day she'd be simply, and darkly happy. She used to think that somewhere there was a human boy who heard all her thoughts but didn't know it, and someday she'd find him and make him remember that he'd known all along she was there. That night they knocked on the bathroom " and said that a child had been born. Their friend had had a baby, and it was as if God had spoken, just as you sitting there telling me that sand is sand, you with your introspective are like God speaking to me, and I have to be like jello, "

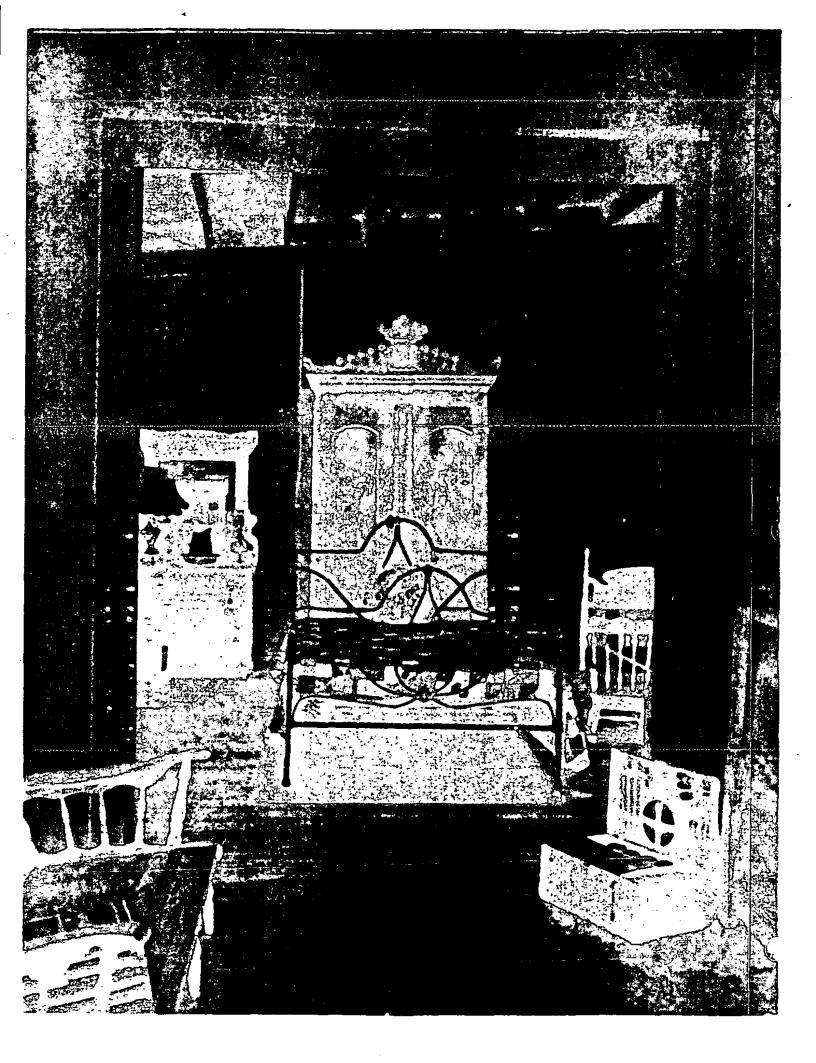
This is for a woman from Illinois the calm valleyed womb of the country where one sees the round horizon but never touches it;

and seeing it for the first time. As it is Not just --as it is to one shelf These are the free-thinkers -- make Those who trust what they Know, And fall into holes. May you someday fall into this. But you will have to remember;

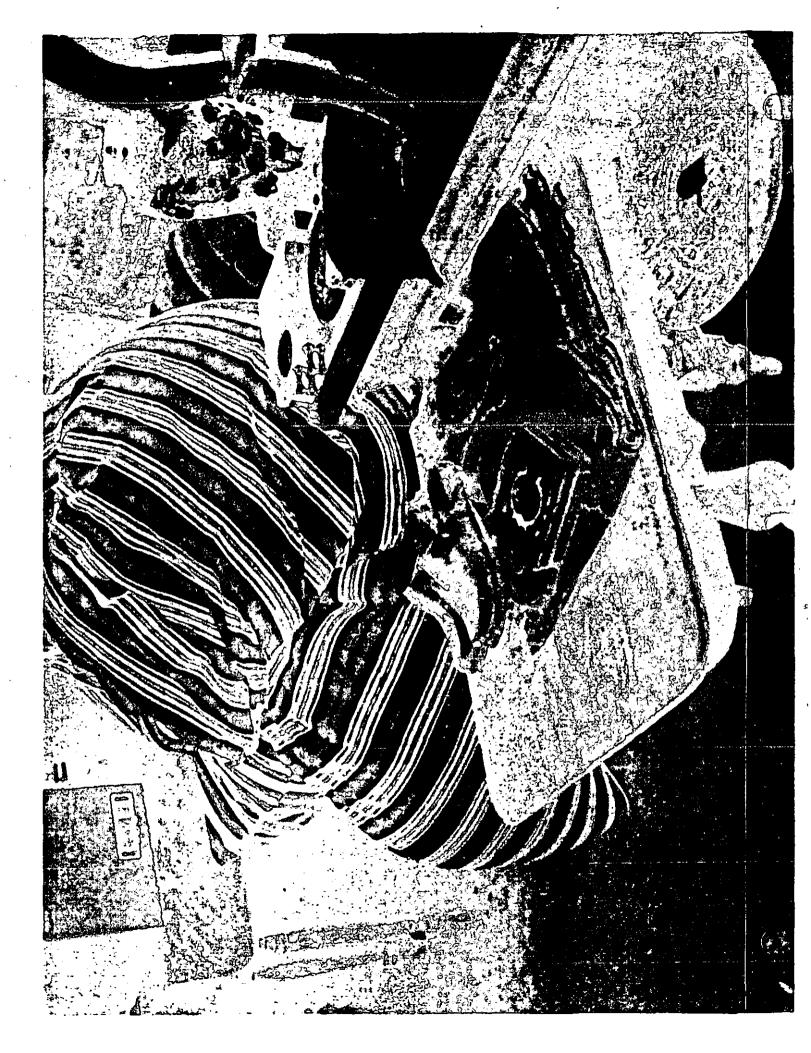
You cannot be afraid of the dark

Passages





Two women have the same drea night after night of doorways yawning open --asking them in to endless ongoing possibility



A mother finds roomfuls of beautiful, preserved wants. The things she's not bought reside here, awaiting her.



Her daughter moves perpetually upward through the atticks. She climbs out on rooftops and she lies down on mattresses fattened with the souls of flightless birds. Her rooms have sinking floors full of others' decomposing possessions



One night they meet in the basement-candy-warehouse. At the absolute bottom the daughter asks the mother what she'd feared so much up there. Could it be that she'd encounter long disregarded, swept up decisions?

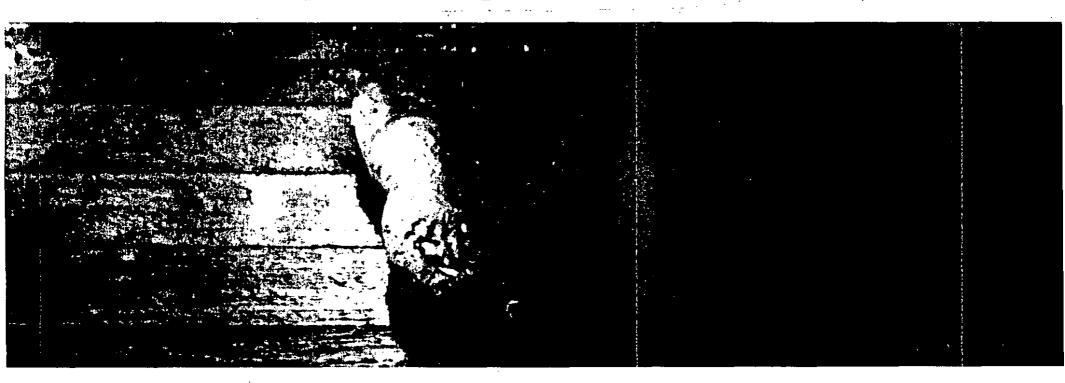
Had she picked up some trinket and put it in her pocket, would that turn the key? Would she wake up to a different life, one without a map, or on her own without a man, completely astray from her original plan?

What's Eating Earth?

The perfect idea of mustard Painted on a saltine mural

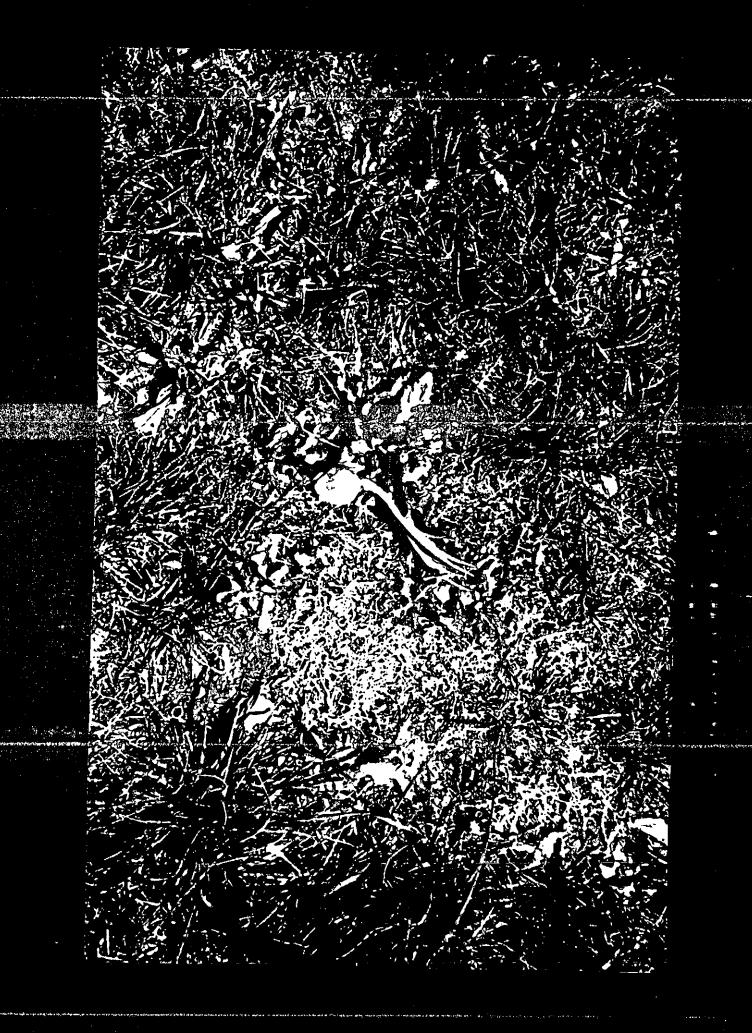
Is like the notion of chickpeas To the black-eyed nation,

More the color of a floor Than a thing to be eaten --



Yet, so logical.

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Peeling Off of My Mother

If we didn't have our egos like magnets, sticking our self-pity to cork-board in the kitchen. If we didn't all have refrigerators covered with scribbles we presented to our mother as her portrait. If she hadn't looked . . . at our scrunched up mad faces and said "this is lovely," hanging it next to the drawing we made of our family in front of the house, tall as the second story windows, If she hadn't done that, and linked us to ourselves. We'd have no sense of body, of selfness, of the space we encompass. We'd have no sentimental roots to tie us And our feet would leave the ground to ourselves, like the black claws of beautiful birds

In a dream I had once

I tightened all the muscles in my ares and pushed until my biceps rose and I went with. As if I had forgotten that i couldn't. I began to propel -- laughing and crying and flapping, my arms like a crazed cartoon down the concrete walk. Along the side of our house lifted myself on air, and slid up to the roof, And when my mother got home I did it again, 'I showed her, and I watched her as she stood on lead-flesh feet in the driveway looking up

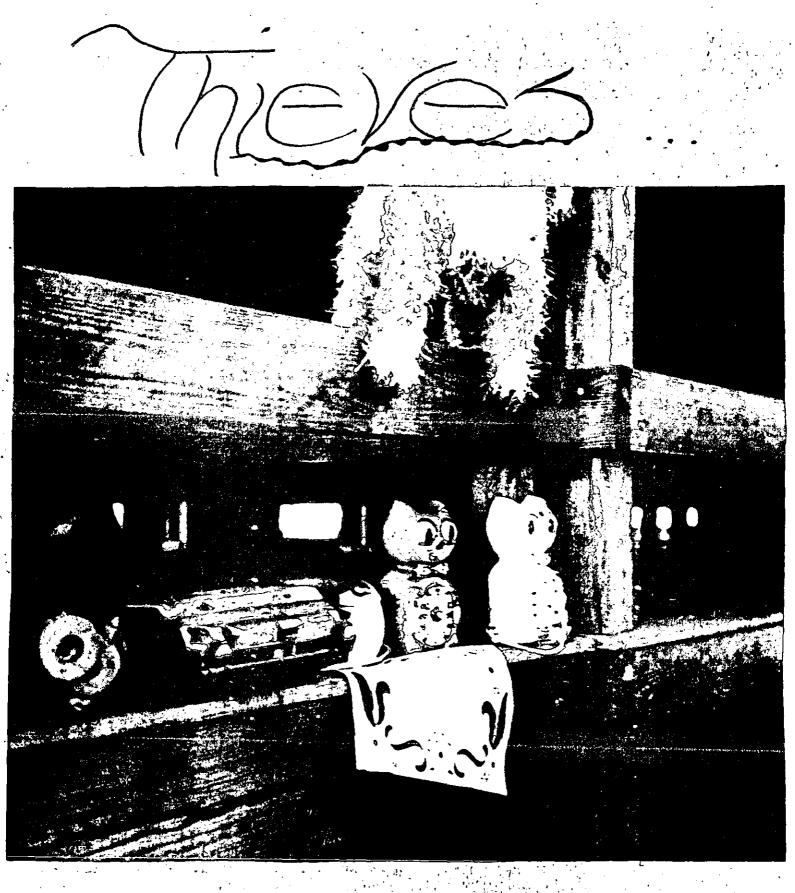
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and it was as if I had cracked open her pearly shell, as if I had never been born and today had swum through her

and burst out, as if she stood there in the driveway. bleeding

as I breathed -- as I finally could breath. I saw it in her, that she knew. 'It wouldn't be long before I'd gone.



She'd been there the last three times, fanned out on the tarred asphalt in a simple black buttonup cotton dress popped open at the knees by her Indian-crossed legs, and her arms hid under a widescooped blue top, beside that boy who looked worn, just like her. They were dishwater brown headed and blue eyed. I'd heard from other gossipers who wander here on Saturdays looking for something new to think about, that they'd suddenly grown smellyrich with the inheritance of some old estate in Virginia. And then I'd heard that they were from Arkansas -- second cousins whose parents unjustly ditched them from the family for doing what they'd considered a common thing -- falling in love, together. On their way out the door, they'd snuck all the dishes and silverware into boxes which they now sell for money.

now sell for money. I can't think for the life of me how I must have phrased the question, but when I crept down on my haunches to look at the blanket piled with silver before her -- I asked.

before her -- I asked. And she answered, strangely, "You must want to know about this unusually early summer we're having."

For a long stretch of buzzing silence i was perched, squatting, stage-frightened somehow, and sweating, until slowly, carefully, she said, "Now that would be a long story Because if you're asking where all this came from," she raised a platter filled with sunlight to my eyes, "how me and Tracy," she pointed to the slumped boy staring off through the parking lot, "how we haggled and bartered accross the country for it, I guess I'd have to start with this itchy feeling we got when we were back at home, because that's where it starts, with that wierd feeling. And that was some time ago."

"Yes," I said. That was probably what I wanted to know.

to know, "Then," she said, raising the flat palm of her hand so that answers might fall into it. "I guess it was an over-rested, over-ready, over-anxious feeling we had about leaving such a vast and claustrophobic place. We probably got it from the people we knew then. There were certain people who tugged and pushed and bore us out of there." K.P. Randall made a lot of money off his grandfather's death. He bought the things anyone would buy with a quick inheritance: two Radiche's, several packs of Sobrane cigarettes, and a 1914 limited edition double barrel sawed off pistol. Tracy sold him his dreams and munitions at the pawnshop, then rolled a cigarette while K.P. balanced his checkbook in the lazyboy beside him. The only thing between them being K.P.'s old green canvas duffle bag, Tracy could see that K.P. would be no poor man, even after going to Canada via Florida -- and starting from Wisconsin.

Tracy walked out the front door of the shop and watched K,P, drive away that January morning in his '67 British Racing Green Jaguar, for which he accepted compliments by directing people's heads inside its window, so that they might notice the black cats growling up from the dash. He was something of an emerald rolling out of town. Who knew if K,P, would ever come back whe had no obligation. He stirred up the steamy frost on the road, and vanished out of color. The thought of it left Tracy wanting to stretch or jump or even to climb up thebricks of the building and look down at where he'd always been, for what seemed like his whole life. It was Bob Castleburry's pawnshop. Bob was known

It was Bob Castleburry's pawnshop "Bob was known for his repetitive stories, as well as his knowledge of the potential net worth of every sellable odd or end he'd ever thought of "Tracy listened to Bob indelibly, as if when he turned his head some divine answer might come sputtering from his mouth like spit, and he'd miss it.

infing the other

When Tracy told him they'd be leaving, Bob looked as if he'd been left without faith, as if there were no other trust-worthy people in Tomah who'd be needing a job -- only Tracy, who'd always been there, traceable to a house on Miller's street where his parent's lived, and to a house on Block where his girlfriend's parents live, traceable as Tom Sawyer. Yet he could not hold himself back from suggestion.

'I recommend you go shopping. Hit some fleamarkets and auctions. I'll tell you where they are. See what those folks got, but don't know what they got. Do a little tradin. See, you get yourself some fella from down in, say, Cobden Illinois, and who knows -- he coulda been keepin all the pens he wrote with for the past fifty years. They run outa ink, he throws them in a drawer, rather than refill em, goes and gets himself a new one. And a lot of those pens weren't nothin when he bought em, but they go up in value when the issue's discontinued. Well, that guy could have an old Parker 51, somethin worth thirty five to maybe a couple hundred bucks. You buy that thing for eight, you can't go wrong. Yeah, boy.'

Bob had an apparent habit of ending speaches like that, with 'yeah, boy,' said much like 'yessir-ee-bob.' He'd speel off a load of information or dirty jokes, whatever his nature being at the time, and then he'd shake his head and sometimes whistle and say it like that, 'yeah, boy,' as if the total luck or injustice of it impressed him so.

The night Bob set it all down on paper, the map of where to go and who to talk to was the first night they'd all gone to his place for dinner. Always before it'd been his parents shouse he'd ask them to, In the living room he'd made it seem as if an he must have known every other peddler in the U.S. "Oh, I never keep anything for more than a year," he said, "because I always know someone who'll give me more than I paid for it, the like this pipe here." He took it out from between his teeth. "I know a guy who'll give me double what I got this for. It's all just a matter of rolling it around in the palm of my hand and figuring out when I want to give it up," What Bob did hold onto, his Rolex, his car, his Burberry trenchcoat was valuable. Tracy of would say Bob was playing the system, that you can make money at anything if you can figure out the rules. When she looked at it that way it seemed honourable, quick-witted, as if there's somthing romantic about disarming the system, that it keeps the doors open, which have

At some point she got up and wandered into the hallway out of sight. All the doors were closed, but she looked in anyway, moving from one to the next, amazed. Bob, on the inside, lacked his exterior desire for aesthetics. The carpets were covered with plastic. The rooms all smelled like dogs.

"Tracy and Bob are in most ways opposite in character," she assured <u>me</u>. "Tracy is a minimalist. He owns a roll-up cot-mattress and a good stereo.

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That's it," Tracy's lack of material posession grants him mobility, insures against the loss of items too vast or large to carry on a train or fit in a car trunk. It was easy for Tracy to leave Wisconsin. She, on the other hand, had to give away most of her possessions, writing them all down like a will and then passing them out to friends and to charity. The larger items, the kitchen table and irector's chairs, rugs, sofa, coat-tree and lamps she put in a borrowed pick-up truck, and carried them home to her mother. That meant that everything she packed into the car was of use to her. She had rid herself of everything frivolous and was free to start over, or to stay that way, unmaterial and unburdened.

A bizarre late April snowstorm fell the night before they left, and at five a.m. as they pieced themselves together, overlapping luggage, a blueness rose over the world as if seeping up through the snow into their feet, through their veins. Manna felt romantically infected, like when she watch the end of a movie and her eyes water. The hotel orange Denny's, the unused miniature golf course, and the small cage of the Dixie Cream finally passed her by in their receding, and she found she had no voice, no control of ther heart, as one might feel when staring down far too long from a high-dive. They wound round the fown counterclockwise, then vaulted up the ramp onto the highway. She'd always imagined going through this motion, how the highway circles the town and the ramp sends you taking off, and she'd thought how it's so like untying a knot, this exit.

As they drove forward the blue haze began whitening, the dirty snow gathered in chunks like stepping stones along the highway, and with each blink it began almost to hurt it was so white, like a high pitched noise, then whiter, out of tune and piercing in combat with the sun as it ran alongside them, It followed them out of Wisconsin, then fell back at the Illinois border, only pieces of it holding on, those pieces getting smaller, easing away. When it was all gone she felt nothing, save the subsiding of her heart falling back to floating in its cavity.

In Illinois the world seemed to flatten out, and $\pi \in \mathbb{R}$ throughout it there were houses, a remarkable

number of them, abandoned, surrounded by land which bares nothing. Like old women with their bones still intact in rows, all the color'd gone out of them. "You know, places just go right on changing," she said, "decaying or growing, depending on if somebody wants them after we don't anymore. Seems more places decay than grow though, don't you think?"

They could tell the world was getting warmer. A foot above the earth in some spots stood the orange-colored suspension of lillies waving about in their new lives. When they got to driving 80, she rolled down the window for the air to break in, to steal away with the breath they d been breathing all morning. She climbed into the pink bean-bag in the back seat, leaving her legs in the front, rolling up her jeans, shutting her eyes, and dissipating into the clearness of seventy degrees.

She remembered the next day well rshe said, She remembered the next day well, she say because it surprised her that the middle of nowhere was actually somewhere very real . They were in a warehouse about the size of a gootball field lined wall to wall with people and families with contents of their junk-drawers and attics piled up on tables in front of them. Sunlight sprang through the room on depression glass -- so much purple and white transluscence, Women with rhinestoned sweatshirts matched their cases of costume dewelry in a corner, propped up on what looked like a plywood scaffold, were two plastic cat-clocks, pink and blue, the kind from the fifties, with eyes that click back and forth. They sat on a small needlework prophesy; Happiness Is Where We Find It, #But Rarely Where We Seek It, A day's worth of thought, And then there were tables of dolls as old as Betsie Wetsie and still alive with their hair all falling out and their dresses dirty.

Behind one of these tables sat a half-toothless man in baby-blue overalls and a faded pink print cap. She took his picture because henlet her, and because he looked so like his dolls, She told him she was moving, she'd already gotten far -- this far.

When he'd looked her over he said, "We got a daughter too, She's a real tallented girl, about your age, Went up there to lowa State, Of course, she's grown away from us, Real tallented girl,'





'*They do that*,' She told him, What was she to say, with him looking at her like that, like she was familiar?

"I hadn't thought he was so young," she said, "But then maybe he hadn't thought I was so young, " Maybe he hadn't seen his daughter since she left, and she remained in his mind with a face like mine, unchanged,"

This huge room in the middle of Tennessee, it as knew nothing about time, and discardment, and the second s

She began to get the shivery feeling that maybe there wasn't such a thing as time. At the fleamarkets they went to, Tracy sent her looking for old metalware. She wasn't to be concerned with what shape these things were in. They could be tarnished just as long as they weren tidented. In fact the more tarnished the cheaper they'd be. So she found old aluminum cups with names and flowers engraved on them, one cup for each finger. Then she stacked serving trays under her arms, green, silver, and sterling copper all rubbing off on her shirt, making her smell like dirty money.

Tracy used to be a plater in high school. He had a friend in California, working at Gold Seal in Oakland who could let Tracy into the place after hours. They could plate these things silver, or even dip them in this purple electric liquid and have them come out twenty three karat gold, all for free. It was almost like bootlegging, or laundering money.

Transformable items were easy to find too. They stopped at an auction in Burns Flat Oklahoma for two hours while Tracy bid on a set of aluminum dishes. Tracy was an excellent bidder. He'd get a gleam in his eye as if he'd found some new sport he'd failed to notice all through childhood. He and an eighty year old woman bid head to head on that box of dishes, first raising dime for dime then quarter for quarter until Tracy said 'No more of this gambling with Monopoly money' and cried out 'Five dollars.'

Under the continuous cry of the bidders she walked around the card tables. There were always piles of blankets at auctions -- lots of crocheted throws and collections of baby clothes, outgrown and cut up for quilts. There were picture albums and livingroom furniture sets and entire collections of Avon perfume and aftershave figurines, cars and presidents and pastel plastic women standing on months,

That was the day they walked down a long line of cars to get to their own, and then there stood a thin bald man letting his dog pee on their tire.

'Is someone sick?" he said, 'Beg pardon?'

'All these cars parked here, I thought someone Section was sick."

'No, Just an auction,'

'Ah, will that's good, Glad no one's sick, You

folks have a nice day.' 'You too, sir,' she said. She was sad, though. "If you think about it -- all that furniture, the 🚈 picture books and everything collected, all sitting --out on the lawn like that -- just sitting there in . the sun after being dusted and polished and sewn on all those years, That only happens when someone's dead -- and pretty much everyone's igone. 4 14 34

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A Starting There were no more auctions after that, and no fleamarkets either -- just a race through the south west, through the long white trees of Colorado which kept them looking up at where they pointed, their fingers circling, rubbing tarnish remover 1.2 onto silver finishes, What they couldn't get clean they'd have to take care of in Oakland, throwing it we all into cyanide, then into the electro-cleaner for as an hour, and then they'd have "to scrub with a me toothbrush, 5.

She was stripping a serving platter, It had turned green in spots, and the pinkish-gold copper shown through in others. It looked intentional -the vine-pattern olive green with copper shining like evening-light behind it. Tracy insisted it wasn't intentional, it was meant to be used for food, to be kept unbtarnished and replated or replaced when it got old. Nothing is meant to grow old gracefully. She rubbed at the green and it turned all to light, her face slowly rising to the surface. They started talking about materialism,

Tracy stood his ground, in that it doesn't matter how much someone wants, just so long as they value what they have enough to take care of sit, so it doesn't get old or ruined, so they don't have to any get another, because that's the worst kind of γ materialism, the kind that feeds supply and demand, -----'That's the nourishment of waste,' he'd say,"...

The sun had been high in the sky,~bouncing off 👘 the copper tray, off the white trees, soff the be windshield, so that whichever direction she looked,

her eyes hurt and she squinted. 'Material -- wood, plastic, metal -- maybe it helps people keep their footing in this world.' She was thinking of the collections -- the perfume bottles, macrame, and dolls. 'Are we buying people's lives for quarters, and selling them?' she asked. 'And if so, do we make the lives worth something?'

All over the country old women died, having seen maybe a hundred miles in any direction from the spot on which they lay,

He flipped down both sun visors Now that the 📨 road had curved, the sun was directly in front of them, stealing away with their peripheral vision.

"In California the grass is the color of wheat, and roses bloom in the most unlikely places, in the slums and up chain-link fences. This is the end of the earth -- the place where people came to find ... The sea makes it windy all the time, wso that gold, in San Francisco it's never really hot or cold, I hear that there is not enough water for all the 1 people who live here, that it is illegal to water your lawn.

Tracy stopped on brick street, parallel parking by one of the places Bob told us to come to, the Cobblestone House, It sits between a thrift store jewelry, and watches, and left the box sitting beside me, I didn't care to move, There was a 🦽 jeweler's eye in the box and I looked through it, focussing on my finger print, and on the various freckles of my body, I still felt like the car was in motion, as if I was still, and the street, the 😁 sky, the buildings were all moving, I started to \cdot think a lot about the man in the Cobblestone House, that he was sick of San Francisco, just as sick of 🐇

it as I'd been of Wisconsin, I wondered if the people walking in and out of the thrift store were buying new jeans and new ties because they are sick of who they are and where they live, I bet that some oblique part of their subconsciousness believes that their minds will be set into motion if they make some small change, if they just have we something new to wear, I know better, I know the changes have to come bigger,"

"*So now we live in the Golden state," she* said. "Every Saturday we carry our boxes and bags full of stuff to this fleamarket accross from the Bart station, set it all out on the asphalt, drink bottled water, eat funnel cakes, wait, We we make a lot of money by now. We deffinitely made wit accross 👘 the country for free, We keep selling though, so we can move on someday, Sometimes I tell People these are my family heirlooms," She looked up atome; "I --guess that's why you asked. It doesn't matter if we lie. Nobody knows us. We'll keep selling till it's all gone, I imagine."

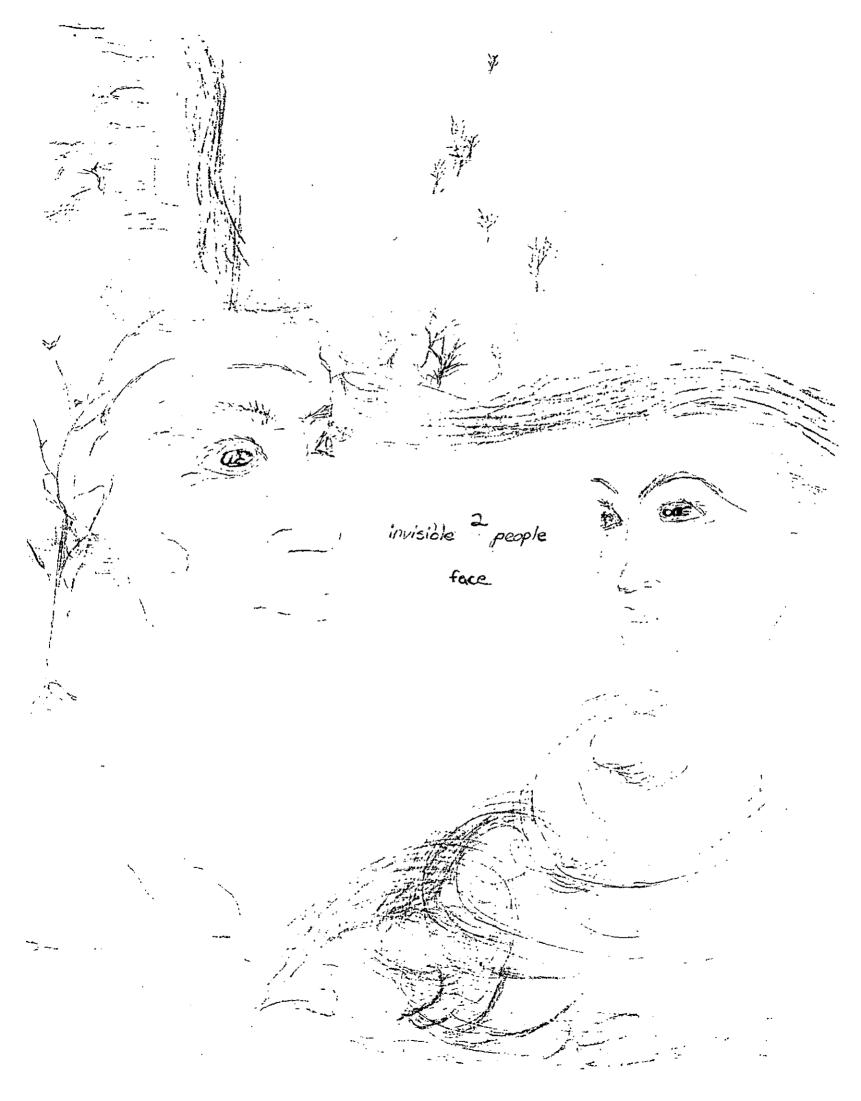
//ie, Nobody knows us, We'll keep selling till it's
all gone, I imagine."
Yeah, I thought --till they've got nothing left.
"I've got to get on the subway," I said ' Nice
talking to you."
 "I like the subway," she said, as if she'd been
about to reach up her hand and grab me back.""I
think there's really something to it."
I knelt back down. "What's that?" I asked.
"Well you know the motion of it -- Of flying

"Well, you know, the motion of it -- of flying over the neighborhoods where little Latino children run rampant and color on the walls of the world. Some people's lives are so different from my own,"

What I kept thinking of when I got on the subway, was K.P. Randall. I was wanting to think that he'd sat in solitude at some reclusive spot in Canada, and that eventually, he'd move back to Tomah, He'd buy a house with two lots, so this yard stretched out in all conceptual directions, And he'd buy cars for all his friends, who'd drive them to the grocery store, and to Denny's at three in the morning, I'd like to think of him distributing motion from that place on his porch where he sits, still, maybe watching the snow, and eating, we

And I thought about that subway thing, because it seems to me that little Latino children, and old men in Tennessee, and young couples in Wisconsin are all reaching to scratch the same itch. It seems

that each and every one of these subway cars is a potential decision, and none of them any different from the next. But in between each one is a point of suspension, and it feels much the same as going 80 down the highway with your feet up and your eyes closed. The only thing around you is yourself.



Sometimes the man wakes and wonders who the hell this is this girl who casts her arm over his side like leftovers. How did it start, this ongoing we between 2 random people? Who are you that you've grown so sick so tired, so weary of endings?

More like two I's, he'd say, else we'd be 4, not II. How straight and hollow those I's the they think, pressed together. The indefinitely invisible indefinable We.

Seems some 2s only face one another when one 2's sleeping backward, like ans

Afternoon

On the back of a paycheck stub On the unmade bed that day:

WILL YOU TAKE THE NEGATIVES I DON'T HAVE THE TIME ...

Can we help the other out As lovers take each other's punches Sh... ...wish past strangers on the street Brush the alien on the shoulder Touch cool leather with lightest of pressure Ground him so's his spirit's in his arm Not To the orb of red irration,

Walk on Hold hands Pull with them as An arrow Down the sidewalk Between us Abandon confusion.

One heart slows faster than the other Feet go Right Right Left Eyes take over for the arrow Pull the faster as a link Into a shop where So and So are leaning By the honeysuckle sticks and postcards.

By the noneysuckie sticks and postarus. Touch elbows with So while talking Bring bent arm in to ribs Then hang it

from a ball joint bone. Touch elbows again Bring darkness in to where The eyes Get bigger Grow calmer More Peripheral Distance in grasp among walls stacked With green ceramic lounging Buddahs And Indonesian rice paper cigarettes Disintegrating to the fingers of So.

Put foot between lover's Shin to calve Arch to arch Press on The same ground Smell chickory

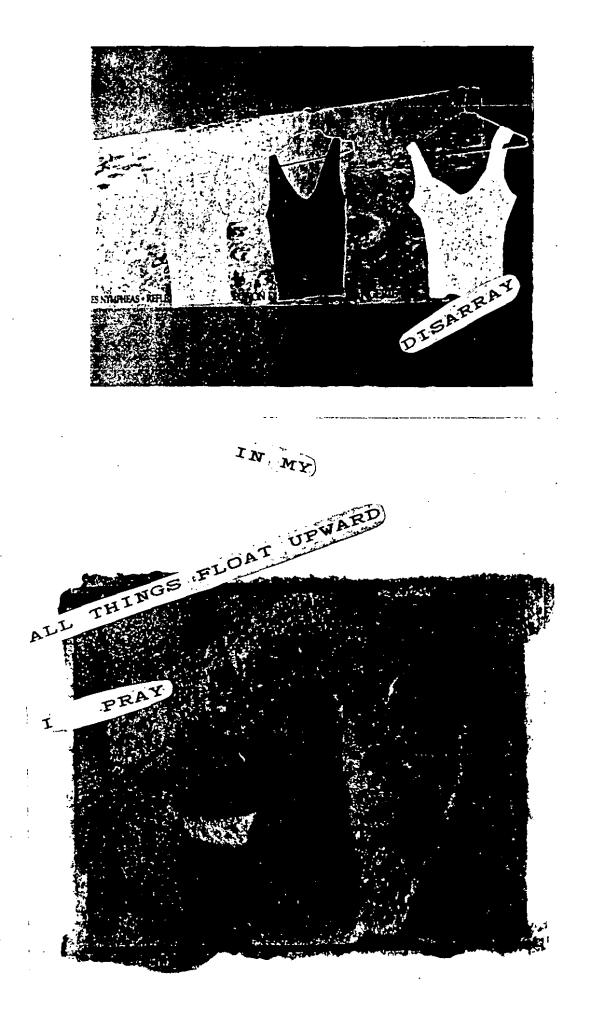
Breath unheavily Land And touch Base,

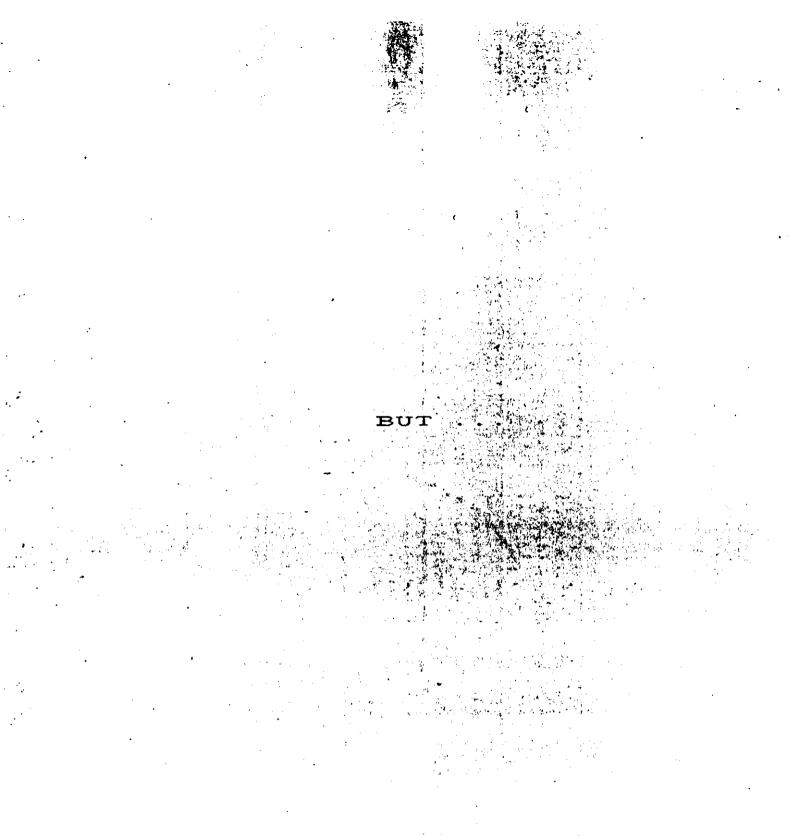


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• . If anything had happened Just a little differently, It might have all Looked something Like this ...



This has been a Senior Honours Thesis Project by Diana Brawley

I would like to thank;

My parents, for driving me to Cadiz; Danna and Scot, for their legs; Nick, well, for all kinds of things, but specifically for the last picture, which he took in the dark in the middle of the night; The guys at Kopies and More; Sean O'Toole; The Honours Program; and, more than anyone, Dr. Richard Lawson, for letting me do this.