It is generally ſuppoſed, that the imagination of women is particularly active, and leads them aſtray. Why then do we ſeek by education only to exerciſe their imagination and feeling, till the underſtanding, grown rigid by diſuſe, is unable to exerciſe itſelf—and the ſuperfluous nouriſhment the imagination and feeling have received, renders the former romantic, and the latter weak?

BARNARD LITERARY MAGAZINE

BARNARD LITERARY MAGAZINE

Spring 1981

The Barnard Literary Magazine was
typeset in Baskerville and Garamond by
Waterfall Graphics, and printed by
Tower Press, a division of
Press Women Enterprises.

Barnard College, Columbia University
606 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027

Contents

Stillness in the Country

Weather hangs a blue-gray sheet for sky.
Below it, mountains hold an indigo line.
You move from bed to no mail in box
to lunch sitting table cold.
Only cicadas sound.

Fear pressed you back to sleep
this morning and half the day.
Waking guilty, you found the fear
just over your head,
hovering like ether-fog

from which you surfaced,
choking on covers,
almost unable to chin-up,
eye morning and beat the fear
in its own game of starting down.

You rub you eyes, trying to thin the lids
that swell in sleep and stay
swollen, glucose-heavy, thick as
dead tongues in jars.
Your fear has no name.

This week the monarchs mate.
Wings will surround your backyard trees,
beat among the leaves,
become the leaves,
and fall from them, hooked in pair,

throbbing double-winged, tails joined,
staggering like a fleet of overweighted kites
against uncertain wind.
Such fury linked to come undone,
pass on and drop by brittle, failing wings—

the monarchs mate.
Too early cool, this end of August
curls the edges brown on milk weed leaves.
An egg, a seed, a subtle chill:
alone, you are losing human speech.

Melody Davis

June talks about her house

I am building myself a home out of smooth pebbles
and jagged rocks. Stone is stronger than wood;
stone never rots or gets termites. Pressure creates diamonds.

I collect pebbles from the shallows
of clear streams and pile them into my wheelbarrow.
After sunset,
I sort them. I pick pebbles that won't be crushed.

The best rocks are found in the craters of extinct
volcanoes. I have designed a system of levers and pulleys
to move them. I choose rocks that are not cracked.

Diamonds must be mined. These I choose for strength
and clarity. I have only a few because it is hard
to breathe
in the wet depths. I am not greedy.

At first construction was slow:
each rock was too heavy, it took hours to fill in spaces
with pebbles,
I often cut my fingers on diamond shards.

Later, as I developed skill and strength,
piling stone upon stone grew easier
and I learned to find balance points quickly.

I have spent a long time building my home.
So far, all I have is a shell that catches the morning sun
and bounces it over the volcano. Yet, slow as
this work is,
I know I will finish.

Carol Dorf

Sometimes there are nights when you feel like sleeping naked the feel of your soft flesh hot against the cool sheets and you feel your hands throbbing and your cheeks are flushed like the sky at sunset with sweet rum when we take a walk through the cool streets towards the river you are a tree a willow graceful or a strong oak you are as strong as the oak you can never fall oh you have fallen so many times before but never again you are like that old oak by the churchyard where the earth swells mounds grown over with grass you are as different from me as the rose is from the bramble and oh god so innocent and I feel so out of place I've always been out of place alone and apart on those walks by the churchyard the steeple rising above me piercing the sky the way you smell comes to me your clothes your rooms your temples it is your ouisa brown and warm like Lolita your name trips off my tongue and is lost in your lithe brown movements sweet oh sweet like a child like a child's breath but strong like a man and all I see is you you standing on that bridge overlooking the Charles with that ancient city swelling all around you and you are the center of the city the center of the universe my life and I feel myself about to burst into a million pieces and float down on you like rose petals on five thousand screaming fans and the stars begin to riot and I am dancing following following you through a land unsown.

Rachel Esner

The House is Abandoned

I suppose I am the recipient
Of prevenient grace. The world
Became different effects. And there
The figures are all involved in
The realization of thought.
Sometimes I don't feel I have the
Right to talk about
Impressionism, or a
Feeling.

The weeds grow thick in the garden.
I would want to get my name up
There in the sky as often as
Possible. The house has been
Abandoned. The fallen leaves lie
Wet and thick upon the paths.
I imagined how the winds of
Winter would howl around it, how
The cold rain would beat upon the
Window-glass, how the moon would make
Ghosts on the walls of the empty
Rooms, watching their solitude all
Night. I thought of the grave in the
Churchyard, underneath the tree.
Anything can be a ghost. I
Don't even have to look; I know
What's going on everywhere.

Joseph Lease

Untitled

Northern lights no longer.
We returned: dirtstains
drained dry,
skies strained
back to black.

We sit on stoops just to pass the time.
At dawn a starling skims gray waters,
scales fish filled air of a
Brooklyn bay.
Your guitar picking fingers are dry,
but still smell of grass and weeds.
You tell me
the size of an octave is enough.

Once I took off all my clothes
and groped on the cement for cracks.
That was the summer the fields
grew crusts
and the dry wind cracked,
"Barefeet,"
I screamed.
I tore the socks off your feet.
Heel, ball toe, sink,
Must mold our feet.
the cracks.
We had too many fingers
flying in the air.
That dirt crumbled
as soon as—

We thought: root
toes, sink, tunnel, and
ohhh,
the sign
so long
as our arms
drop flapping
at our sides.

The blue winter skies approach
and shall we,
crushing at our sides
cigarettes on stoop cement . . .
Can we fly?
Blue winter skies come cold,
but so do geese
when they fly south.

Carla Massey 9

The Book of Winters

When the snow lingered in the streets for days
and days, you were an image of the snow,
not a song of snow but a song of ways
to bracket snow,
portrayed religiously upon the world.
The snow glittered in the slanted rays
of winter twilight falling on the ground.

You are far away; you are hard to see.

Joseph Lease

The Summer

Carol Marks

The first thing Ida did to prepare for the boy was to find Ed's old stamp collection and lay it out on the desk. The thick pages were coated with dust. When she set the book down a billow of grey blossomed into the room. She opened the window, letting the dust mingle with the manure-tinted scent of apples and hay. Although the book hadn't been touched in years, all the pages and stamps were still intact. She evened the stack of loose stamps at the back of the book. Then she dusted the room, replaced the sheets on the bed with fresh ones and changed the water in the flower vase.

She went into the bedroom she and Ed shared and returned to the spare room with packages in her arms. She removed a new foot-ball from a bag and set it on the dresser. She looked at it doubtfully, wondering whether they played football in the city. She was embarrassed that it looked so new. She shrugged and hung a dart board on the wall. She stepped back, lifted each dart from its groove in the styrofoam and tossed them at the board to make a few holes. Each dart hit the board lightly and fell to the floor. She picked them up and stuck each one into a different place on the board, leaving the bulls eye free for the boy. She set a few books on the bookcase. She and Ed had wondered what a fourteen year old boy would like to read and had decided, because they had never met him, to offer him as deverse a selection as possible. Mrs. Grimm, the social worker, told them he had completed the eighth grade. She bought him *The Secret of the Old Lagoon* (Hardy Boys, because the saleswoman recommended it), *Gulliver's Travels* and a beautiful picture book on the birds he would see out there in the country. She and Ed had decided against giving the boy a book about farms; better

not rub in the fact that he was a city kid and knew nothing about the country. He would feel awkward enough.

She unwrapped a bulky package and set a baseball bat down in the corner. She had no idea who the boy was going to play with; Ed didn't know a thing about baseball and she did not know any people with young sons. But her limited exposure to adolescents had shown her that they did things in groups and she hoped that when the time came he would make friends in school.

The front door slammed. "Ed?" she called, setting the wrapping paper on the bed. She wondered what he was doing home in the morning.

"It's just me, Mrs. Appleton."

"It's noon already?" Frank, the first hired man, came into the house each day at noon to take his eye drops. Something was wrong with his eyes, he had explained to Ed, and he had to take drops in the morning, at noon and before he went to bed. When he did it in the fields dust got in his eyes and made them water. He was so punctual about coming into the house to nurse his eyes that Ida could tell the time by his arrival. She walked quickly back into the room and cleaned up the wrapping paper. She shut the window a bit and went down into the kitchen. The boy was arriving at two.

Ida had decided that to honor his arrival, she would make her foster-son-to-be a gooseberry pie. She was prett sure they didn't have gooseberries in the city, though of course, they had apples and peaches and strawberries. She made the pie and put it in the oven. Then she started the roast and tidied up the kitchen. At one thirty Ida removed her apron and opened the kitchen door. The warm scent of the country, of apples and hay and corn, mingled with the meat and pie smells in the kitchen. She swept the porch off and straightened her hair. She looked anxiously at the clock, wondering what to do next. She had fifteen minutes before the boy arrived.

She walked from room to room downstairs to make sure everything was in order. The dining room smelled like polish. Her mother's silver candlesticks reflected on the wooden table. The living room was clean but seemed rather shabbier than usual, so she fluffed up the sofa cushions and straightened a stack of newspapers. The flowers in the dining room were hastily rearranged, the pie taken out of

the oven and set to cool on the windowsill. She tidied her tidy hair again, and then heard a car driving down the road that led to the house.

Mrs. Grimm had parked alongside the barn. As Ida went out to meet them, she kept her eyes on the woman who was getting out of the car. She felt too shy to look at the boy. Mrs. Grimm met her with an extended hand, fingernails, Ida thought, red as the apples out back.

"Hello Ida," the social worker said. She was in her forties and lived in the suburbs. Ida was always aware of the subtle differences between the two of them; Mrs. Grimm's set hair, Ida's own home-curled; Mrs. Grimm's linen suit and Ida's cotton dress; and Ida wondered whether the boy sensed their differences. "And this is Arlin," Mrs. Grimm was saying.

Finally, Ida looked right at the boy. The first thing she noticed was that his eyes were different colors. One was quite dark, almost black, and the other was discernibly colored with blue. She found it difficult to look away from those eyes, and when she did she was surprised at how small he was. Something had given her the notion, probably television, that city boys were bigger. He looked much smaller than his fourteen years. Dark hair stuck up from his head in spikes; his face was pale, his mouth small and tense. He wore a leather jacket over an orange tee-shirt, Levi's with rolled cuffs and tennis shoes. The laces were strung in parallel lines up the sides rather than criss-cross. Ida was surprised that he looked so, well, regular. He looked pretty much like the boys she saw leaving River County High School, but darker, and there was an aura of weariness about him she had never sensed in a boy before, though, of course, her exposure was limited.

"Hello Arlin." She smiled and extended her hand. His hand was small and sweaty in hers. "I'm Ida. You can call me—" It occurred to her that she had never really concluded on this thought at all; what was the boy to call her? That was one advantage to taking only babies; you weren't faced with anything that could talk.

"You just call me Ida," she finally said. She beamed at both of them. "Well, come on in. Have some cider or something. Ed's out in the field," she said over her shoulder as she led them to the house. "He won't be back til six or so."

They followed her into the kitchen, "You just set your bag down there," she said to Arlin, "and sit down." He carried a small vinyl suitcase which he obediently placed next to the stove. He and Mrs. Grimm sat at the table in the sunny kitchen while Ida poured out three glasses of cider. She put them on the table along with a plate of cookies her friend Honey had made. Then she sat down.

"Didn't we have a nice drive, Arlin?" Mrs Grimm said brightly. "It's such a nice drive out here from the city," she said to Ida. "The city-ness diminishes by degrees. First through the city itself, then the highway through the industrial parts; and oh, Arlin, didn't we see a lot of strange factories? And then through the suburbs on and on until we just saw farms and fields for the longest time, didn't we Arlin? And we stopped at the most darling little roadside stand, a real little general store it was, you know, with the cutest little restaurant, and a post office and a little gas station; real old fashioned and Arlin had his first taste of gooseberry pie there, didn't you, Arlin?"

Arlin nodded, looking at the table.

"Oh." Ida said. "Well, she said brightly, "I made a gooseberry pie myself today."

"Isn't that funny!" cried Mrs. Grimm. Well, Arlin! What do you think of that?"

Arlin swallowed his cider in three gulps. Ida immediately rose took the pitcher out of the refrigerator and refilled his glass. "Thank you," he muttered, to the table.

Mrs. Grimm looked at her watch. "I have to be going soon, Ida. Why don't we show Arlin to his room. I think he might like a little nap. It was a long day."

"All right," Ida said. "You can take that up with you," she told Arlin. He picked up his glass of cider. Mrs. Grimm took his suitcase and Ida led them up the narrow stairs into Arlin's new room. The ceiling was slanted and beamed, the walls of wood. The view looked out across the meadow, the apple orchard and the stretch of highway on the horizon. "This is your room," Ida said nervously. "The bathroom is right around the corner. I'll just see Mrs. Grimm out and then I'll set you up with towels and such."

Arlin walked over to the window and stood looking out. Ida stared for a moment at his jacketed back, then led Mrs. Grimm downstairs. They walked out to her car.

"He takes a while to warm up," Mrs. Grimm said, looking at her watch. She opened the door of her car. "Ida, if there's any problem, call me. I know you've taken only babies so this might be difficult at first. Teenaged boys, especially from deprived environments are difficult to communicate with sometimes. Also, he's just come from the state reformatory, as I told you, and he'll need a while to get adjusted. In general, of course, teenagers are difficult."

Ida did not mention that she had bought a book on the subject.

"You have all my numbers, right?" Mrs. Grimm asked. She got into her car. "If you need anything, just call anytime. If not I'll be in touch next week to see how things are. Good luck."

"All right, Mrs. Grimm. Thanks for bringing him out."

"So long, Ida. Tell Ed I said hello."

Mrs. Grimm's big blue car rolled off in a cloud of dust.

Ida went back inside and tiptoed through the hall. She realized that she didn't want the boy to know she was in the house, but she wasn't sure why. She went into the kitchen and cleaned up speedily, stacking the plates in the sink, rinsing the glasses. She stood still for a moment, then went back upstairs. He was still standing by the window. His glass was empty.

"Well, Arlin. Come let me show you the house." They went through the rooms upstairs, Arlin duly following her and peering into each room she pointed out; her bedroom, the bathroom, the sewing room, the other guest room. She showed him the door to the attic which, she explained, let down a ladder when opened. He looked interested.

"How does it do that?"

"It's attached by a spring. I'll have Ed show it to you when he comes in."

They went back into his room. He sat on the bed, she by the door. "I have some chores to do," she said. "Would you like to come with me? or maybe you want to take a nap. Mrs. Grimm said—"

"Nah. I'm not tired. I'll come with you."

In the kitchen, Ida put on her smock. She led Arlin out to the barn. "We're a working farm," she explained as they walked. "There aren't too many farms left like ours. We get by on what we make here. We sell our chickens and eggs and corn. Apples too, a little cream, some bacon. Of course

we eat it as well. We have to work real hard to keep the farm running." She opened the door to the barn and took a step into the dark interior. Arlin stayed outside. "What's the matter?" she asked, turning back.

"What's inside there?"

"Oh," she laughed, "nothing now. All the animals are outside." He took a step into the barn and then stopped, inhaled. "That's hay. Hay," she said, "and straw and feed and milk and outside air." They walked slowly through the barn, Arlin stopping occasionally to inspect the halters, or the trough or an implement hanging on the wall.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing to a blade that hung from the ceiling.

"A scythe. For wheat."

"What kind of animals you got here?"

"We have horses, four cows, one a calf, chickens, sleep, which we're selling, pigs and two dogs. You'll see them all soon enough."

"Any cats?"

"We had a barn cat but he died. Probably find ourselves another soon, or one will find us. They're good. Eat the mice. You like cats?"

"No."

"Well, you won't have to stay around this cat. They stay in the barn."

At the back door Ida stopped and loaded up the pouches in her smock with chiken feed. She nodded toward the closed door. "Chickens out there, and two roosters. Ever been in a chicken pen?"

"Once, at the zoo."

"Well, they won't hurt you."

"I'm not scared of no chickens."

"Of course not. Well, come on. Shut the door behind you."

They stepped out into the pen. Hens squawked and fluttered noisily around their ankles, anticipating dinner. Arlin shrunk back against the barn wall. "Don't worry," she said, "they're just hungry."

"Make them get off my feet." Arlin was stiff against the wall.

"Here," Ida said; then, quickly, to eliminate his discomfort, she tossed a handful of feed into the farthest corner of the pen. Immediately all the birds crowded over

into that corner. She kept feeding them and cautiously Arlin edged his way over until he was standing next to her. "Do you want to feed them?"

As soon as Ida stopped throwing feed, the chickens crowded her ankles again. Arlin stepped back quickly. "Here," she said dropping feed into his hand. "Just throw it onto the ground." Awkwardly, Arlin threw down the feed, tossing it, Ida noticed, as far away from his feet as possible. After a while he seemed to relax and a tense smile appeared as he got used to the action. When there was no more feed and the hens ran at his feet again, he turned and ran back into the barn.

"Well." Ida said out loud. "Scat," she said to the chickens, and walked back into the barn. Arlin was standing inside, looking up at the loft. "You'll learn in a while," she told him. "Chickens aren't harmful at all."

"I ain't scared of no chickens. What's up there?"

"There? Oh, just a loft. Hay. Some ropes and things. You be creful in here. Things can fall on you. Do you want to see the rest of the animals?" Arlin nodded. She led him around the other side of the barn, out the door, to the pen where the pigs lay in the sun. The babies were nursing. "They ate this morning," Ida said, "and we'll feed them again after dinner."

Arlin stared at the nursing babies. "Those are some ugly animals."

"Well," Ida said. "I guess all animals have something nice about them."

Arlin continued to stare. "What do you do with them?"

"Why, we slaughter them. Frank and Ed do that. Frank's Ed's first hired man. Of course, we have other men working but Frank is the main one. Been with us for years. You'll like him. You'll like Ed too. He's pretty quiet but he's a real kind man." Ida realized she was chattering.

"Do you eat them?"

"Eat them? Oh, the pigs. Well, yes. And we sell some of the meat. It doesn't bring in much but every penny counts. We do real well." There was a pause. Ida looked up at the sky. "The sun will set in about three hours."

"They sure are funny looking."

"Haven't you ever seen a pig before?" After she said this Ida was instantly sorry. She had to remind herself that he was from the city and had grown up in a tenement with

only a crazy mother to look after him, and probably a lot of drugs and violence around. When he didn't answer she said feebly, "Lots of people never seen a pig." She paused. I've never been on a subway before," she said apologetically.

Arlin turned and looked at her. "Never?" Ida shook her head, no. Arlin whistled between his teeth, and looked at the pigs again.

"If you like, you can come out later with Frank and help feed them." She started to walk away. "Now the sheep and cows—" she turned and saw that Arlin was still standing by the pig sty watching the animals. "Um, Arlin?" He jumped slightly and walked over to her. "Do you want to see the rest of the animals?" She wiped her hands on her smock, noticing with surprise that she was sweating.

"OK." Arlin glanced once more at the pigs. She led him around the barn, behind the house to the meadow where horses, cows and sheep grazed peacefully. "That's a meadow," she explained.

"I know that," Arlin said. "I been to school."

"I'm sorry," Ida said, sweating profusely. She wished Ed would come home. "It's just that I don't know what city people know and what they don't." Arlin looked embarrassed. He walked ahead of her and stepped onto the lowest rung of the fence, crossing his arms on the top rail. "Would you like to ride the horse?" Ida hoped he would refuse. "We don't ride the big one."

He looked alarmed. "No." His eyes widened. "I don't have to, do I?"

"What?" Ida stared at him for a moment. She felt a wave of concern well up for him, then a real warm feeling of pity, as though she had put out her hand to pat a dog and the dog had cringed out of habit. "Of course not." She shook her head. "Of course not, she said more firmly. After a pause she said, "You don't have to do anything you don't want to do here," hoping that wasn't the wrong thing to say to a juvenile delinquent, if that was what he was. Mrs. Grimm had told her that he'd been in the reformatory because his mother was sick in the head ("mentally disabled," Mrs. Grimm called it), and he had no one to take care of him. Also, there had been some minor incidences involving truancy, and once, apparently, Arlin had kicked a policeman for roughing up a friend of his. Ed had wanted

the details on that incident. Mrs. Grimm assured them over the phone that it did not represent "a chronic rebellion against authority;" the friend was innocent and the policeman was later suspended. Ida wondered whether Arlin had been beaten. He had a weary, resigned air about him and held his shoulders very tightly. Also, Ida thought, he seemed to always be on the verge of cringing.

They stood by the meadow for some minutes. Arlin stepped off the fence, turned and surveyed from this distance the house, barn, yard, and farther off to one side, the orchard. "What are those for?" He jerked his head toward the barn.

"What?" Ida asked. She looked and saw two old tires, a bucket, Ed's pickup, some flowerpots, and some planks of wood.

Arlin walked over to the barn. Ida noticed that his gait was peculiar, like a horse with joint pain, sort of held up unnaturally on one side. She watched him bend over.

"What's this wood for?"

"Why, nothing, that is, unless you want it for something . . . we would just burn it." She walked over and stood next to him.

"Could I—" Arlin's eyes opened wider. They rotated in their sockets suddenly, for the most surprising second, and Ida was tempted to laugh. He had seemed so clownish. He looked at her, biting his lip, and then blurted, "To make a treehouse. I never done that. I just heard about it from a guy I know at home he went to his grandfather's house and he built a house in a tree, you know, a treehouse. He built one."

"Well," Ida said cautiously, "I'm sure you could. Out in the orchard."

He looked at her seriously. "I guess I'll need some stuff. Like maybe," he looked doubtfully at the wood. "A hammer? And some nails?" His voice became more confident. "Please."

"All right," Ida said, relieved he was so easy to please. They went back into the barn where Ida produced the required items. He took the hammer and nails and inspected them carefully. Can't be the first time he's used those, Ida thought. They went back outside and regarded the wood for a long time. He looked out toward the orchard, then at the wood, then at the orchard again.

"What do I do next?" he asked gruffly.

"Why, I guess take the wood on out to the orchard."

"All right. But you come with me."

Smiling at the thought that he might be afraid of wild chickens in the orchard, Ida waited for him to pick up several planks, and then they walked out to the orchard. It was all the way behind the south meadow, and by the time they reached its outskirts, Arlin was panting. "I gotta' stop smoking," he said, dropping the wood on the ground. Ida instantly wondered if she left an ashtray in his room, then with a jolt remembered that he was only fourteen years old. She didn't know if she should say anything or not. Again, it was easier with babies. They didn't smoke.

"Smoking's bad for you," she finally said mildly, hoping she wasn't indicating too much adult disapproval.

He looked at her, appearing surprised, then started to walk back to the woodpile. In silence, Ida walked with him and this time, when he picked up an armful of planks, she did the same and they dropped them in the orchard together.

"Now I should find me a good tree," he said. He wandered about that end of the orchard for a moment. She heard leaves crackle. She could see a leather elbow here, a blue knee disappearing behind a tree trunk there, and then he poked his head out from behind a tree and said, "Here it is." He walked over to her and they lugged the planks of wood over to the tree he had selected.

Ida squinted up at it. It was, she supposed, a good tree for a treehouse, but the truth was, she had never built one and didn't know a good tree for a treehouse from Adam. "It looks fine," she said approvingly.

Arlin sat down suddenly on the planks of wood. He looked at the ground. "What is it?" she asked.

"I don't know shit about how to do this." Ida flinched. "I don't think I can build one. I never built nothing except once I took the engine of a car apart and put it back together."

"Well," Ida said. "I'll help you."

To her surprise the boy did not offer any resistance to the aid of an old lady, so the two of them set out to build a treehouse. Arlin climbed the tree gracefully and rapidly and sat in the selected crotch peering down at Ida through the leaves. "You hand me the boards when I say." Ida nodded. The boards were heavy and if Ed or Dr. Hesper could see

her lifting them they'd hustle her to bed. She was supposed to go easy on her heart.

"OK," Arlin said. "First board."

She bent over and slowly picked up the plank on top. There was a rusty nail sticking out of the side. She scratched and scraped the board along the tree until Arlin could reach down and grab it, which he did quite soon; and she watched, breathing heavily, as he fitted it into the crotch of the tree. "That fits perfect," he said. He sounded very satisfied. "Next board."

For the next hour Ida grunted and panted and hefted planks of wood up to Arlin. He swore repeatedly when using the hammer (Ida finally told him to grip it closer to the head), but managed to fit eight boards together, some with nails, some without, to build a treehouse which, Ida could see as she arched her aching neck, could accommodate two people comfortably if, she supposed, people could be comfortable sitting it a tree. She yawned. Her smock was covered with bits of moss and bark. Her bun had undone and her hair hung down on her neck. Also, it seemed that the area around her heart was a little sore. Suddenly she felt very tired.

"I'm sleepy," she said abruptly. "I'm going back to the house. Do you want to stay out here?"

"Yeah." Arlin was absorbed in the different views he could have from the tree and did not look down at her.

"Let me have the hammer."

He obediently reached down and extended the hammer to her. Better teach him about putting things away pretty soon, she thought. She walked slowly around the meadow. Just before she went inside she turned and looked hard toward the the orchard. Faintly, she could see the orange of his tee-shirt. She hoped he would be all right out there until dinner. She would nap. Maybe taking in a teenager was more effort than she could handle.

By the time Ida woke up to make dinner she felt much better. She was always amazed at what an hour of sleep could do for a person. Arlin was not in his room so she went out back to see if she could see him in the orchard. Sure enough, there was a patch of orange, still perched in the tree. She went in to make dinner. She suspected Arlin would need a lot of good food—foster children almost always did, even the babies—and she had made an

especially full and tasty dinner for his first night.

At six o'clock she went back out and called his name several times until she saw the orange patch move and then descend. He ran to the house managing, Ida noticed, to unzip his jacket at the same time. He slowed down several yards away from where she was standing, and then stopped. She started again when she saw his eyes. I must get used to that, she thought. She didn't want the boy to think she found him odd. "Dinner's ready." There was a pause. She turned and he followed her into the kitchen. She looked at the clock. Ed would be home in a few minutes. As she did the last minute things, draining the peas, buttering the potatoes, taking the rolls from the oven, Arlin just stood by the stove and watched her. "You can go wash up down the hall," Ida said, lifting a spear of asparagus from the pot. He nodded and left. He returned to the kitchen with wet hair and water glistening on his neck. Ida hid her smile from him.

As she set the roast down on the table she heard Ed wiping his feet on the mat outside. "Here's Ed," she said. Arlin walked quickly over to the other side of the kitchen, and Ed came in followed by Frank. "Ed," she said right away, before Ed even had his jacket off, "this is Arlin. Arlin, that's Ed and Frank." She felt nervous, hoping Ed would take to the boy; then with some surprise, she realized that really, she was hoping Arlin would like Ed. The four of them stood awkwardly in the kitchen for a few moments. Then Ed removed his jacket, looking at Arlin.

"Hello," he finally grunted. Then he walked out of the kitchen and into the bathroom. Ida, who had started to fold napkins, sighed. She had hoped that Ed would be just a little more talkative than usual. He didn't realize that silence made people uneasy. Frank hung up his jacket and left the kitchen.

"You go ahead and sit down," Ida said. Arlin stared at the table. "You sit there." She pointed to the extra place she had set next to Frank. Ed came back into the kitchen and sat down. With just a glance at Arlin, he unfolded his napkin and tied it around his neck just like he did every night, Ida thought; as though tonight were no different. She filled the plates with meat, peas, potatoes, asparagus, and some cold ham left over from last week. She set salad and rolls on the table. Arlin sat. Frank came back into the

kitchen and took his place. Ida finally sat down.

A heavy silence hung over the table. She heard Frank chewing. Ed clanked the salad bowl on the table. Arlin ate steadily. She sighed. "Arlin built a treehouse today in the orchard," she said.

"Oh?" Ed asked, swallowing. "Frank can I have the butter? You build it with the boards we brought in from the highway?" Ed took a roll.

"Yes," Ida answered. "It's a nice treehouse." She looked at Arlin. He ate, staring at his plate. She noticed that he held his fork in his left hand to cut and to eat. She still preferred the older manner of eating and cutting with different hands.

"There's some tribe in Africa, or India, who can't eat with their left hands at all," she said, to puncture the silence.

"What?" Ed stared at her.

"Nothing. Arlin stayed in his treehouse all afternoon, didn't you Arlin?"

Arlin raised his eyes. She saw Frank start at the different colors. It was a little disconcerting. "I guess," Arlin said; then he went back to his meal.

"He also helped me with the chickens," she said brightly.

"Is that so?" Frank asked.

"Well." Ida said. "What went on today?"

"Mike sprained his back trying to fix the fence."

"Not the first time," Ed said, chewing loudly. "He sprained it last winter when he skidded on the hill."

"What was that you put in my lunch?" Ed said suddenly. "That orange thing."

"Why that was apricot flan," Ida said. She tried to put interesting food in his lunch since in the summer, he never had time to come home at noon to eat. "I got the recipe from Lily Marshall. Arlin, will you have some more?" His plate was empty. He handed it to her without saying a word. She filled it with more meat, asparagus and another potato. "Now you just speak up if you want anything."

"Well, Arlin," Frank said. "How do you like the farm?"

"It's okay, I guess."

"Did Ida show you around?"

"I guess."

"We took a look at the animals," Ida said.

"See the baby pigs?" Frank asked.

Ida smiled at him thankfully, glad that at least one of them was outgoing enough to draw a person out. Mrs. Grimm had told Ida that Arlin had never had a proper "father figure" and that a kind and responsible man around the house would provide Arlin with a good "role model," if it wasn't too late.

"Yeah." Arlin raised his head to look at Frank. "They're kind of ugly but they're cool." He went back to his food.

"We fed the chickens," Ida said desperately, hating the silence.

"Maybe you might want to feed the pigs with me after dinner," Frank offered.

"Okay."

"Ed, will you cut some more meat?" Ida asked. She was mad at him, angry at his reticence. She wondered if Arlin would bring out Ed, rather than the reverse. Ed, sensing her disapproval, made a shy attempt to talk with Arlin.

"Where," he cleared his throat, "is your treehouse?"

"In the orchard. Near the field. I mean, meadow."

"Mmm-hmm."

"Didn't you ever build a treehouse there?"

"Oh. Come to think of it, I never did. Not out there. When I was young. When I was a boy I built treehouses."

"This was Arlin's first treehouse," Ida commented.

"She helped me." Arlin jerked his shoulder toward Ida. "She did."

"Did she now?" Ed said. "I'd sure like to see you climb a tree," he said to Ida.

"Nah," Arlin said. "She didn't climb no trees." He bit a piece of meat off his fork. "I know how to do that."

"I'm sure Ed didn't mean," Ida said, then she paused.

There was another silence. Arlin finished his water. "Want some milk?" Ed asked.

"Nope. No thanks."

Ida made extra noise as she cleared the table, to compensate for the silence that surrouned it.

"Gooseberry pie," she said, setting it on the table. "Tea," she said, setting it in from of Ed. "Sanka." she set the cup in front of Frank. She sat, sliced the pie, served

it.

"You have this in the city?" Ed asked.

"No."

"Good, huh?"

"I guess."

"You about ready Arlin? We'll do the pigs. I want to get to sleep early tonight." Frank rose.

Arlin put his jacket on. "Thank you for the nice dinner," he said politely.

"Well." Ida was pleased. "You're sure welcome." She watched him follow Frank out the door, then turned to her husband. "Ed. You have to be more talkative with that boy. He never had a father figure and he needs a good role model." The words felt foreign on her tongue. "You go on and be—his role model. You agreed to take in a teenager and you stick with it. It's not easy, all by myself."

Ed just nodded slowly, as he always did when she scolded him. "He has those eyes," he said, after a while.

"He takes getting used to," Ida said firmly, "but he's a good boy. Mrs, Grimm said to call her and let her know if anything happens that we can't handle."

"Mrs. Grimm," Ed said, shaking his head. He had never liked her. He called her a fake. Ida thought she was alright; a bit too full of labels and theories to suit Ida's taste, but no one said you had to agree with her, or even listen. Besides, she was always there if you needed her and was real careful not to give them difficult babies.

"Mrs. Grimm," Ida yawned, "said Arlin wasn't very bright, but I think he's as bright as anyone."

"What would she know?"

In silence, but a comfortable silence, Ida thought, they drank their tea.

Arlin returned to the kitchen alone. "I fed the pigs." He took off his jacket. "Frank left. He said to tell you."

Ed nodded. Ida could tell he was searching for something to say. "I guess you wouldn't want to eat that stuff for dinner, huh?"

"Also," Arlin said, "we fed the sheeps. Sheep. And we put food in that thing in the middle of the pen—the feeder, Frank said—and the sheep were so hungry they climbed right into the feeder and we had to lift them out but they sh—went to the bathroom all over their food so we had to put other food in. They couldn't get out. They just sat

there and made noise. They're real dumb animals, huh?"

"Yes, " Ed agreed. "We're selling them."

"Arlin," Ida said, "we go to bed real early around here. Always in bed by nine cause we're up at six. But you don't have to go to bed that early. There's television and some books. And we have some puzzles and such."

"I never go to bed that early."

"Well, don't feel you have to go to bed. Course, once school starts . . . do you want to watch TV?"

"OK."

"Ed will show you where it is and how to fix it so there aren't any squiggly lines. I'm going to bed." She rose and there was an awkward moment during which she wondered whether she should kiss him goodnight, or at least offer him some closing words of welcome. "Well," she said. Impulsively, she took a step toward him and kissed him swiftly on top of the head. He looked amazed, and stared at her. She became embarrassed. "Goodnight."

She turned to Ed. He too stared at her. "Goodnight," she said loudly, and went upstairs.

Before she went to sleep Ida re-read some parts of the book she had bought about teenagers. She had hidden the book in the bathroom because if Ed saw it he would thing her silly to buy a book on such a topic. She felt a little sheepish about it, but felt that there were probably some important things in it. The book informed her that adolescence was "a difficult time." Teenagers, the doctor informed her, "are about to start the process of emancipation, to begin to experience feelings that are difficult to contain, and to relate to people more as adults than a children . . . during the beginning of adolescence they are not yet ready to assume responsibility for themselves and to be capable of containing their drives and fantasies on their own." Sleepily, Ida hoped that Arlin could contain his drives, whatever they were, and hoped that Ed was "relating positively" with him downstairs. Then she fell asleep. She woke twice during the night. It was just, she thought, like taking in a baby. Something woke you up and made you go check them. Arlin slept sloundly.

In the morning Ida warned Ed not to make any noise, as Arlin surely didn't wish to get up at six.

"He'll have to learn sometime," Ed said, shaving. "He ought to come out and help. There's a lot to do."

"I know," Ida said. The vegetable garden needed a lot of work; the corn was ripe; the tractor; needed to be repaired, as did the north and south fences; the barn should be cleaned, the hay was ready for mowing. "Give him this weekend to settle in. Then I'm sure he'll be glad to do some work."

Ed grunted, went downstairs and made coffee. Ida made the bed, peered into Arlin's room, then tiptoed downstairs. She fed the pigs, let the animals out to pasture, made Ed's lunch. Frank came in at six-thirty and he and Ed left for the day.

At ten o'clock Arlin came downstairs. Ida was dusting the livingroom. He went into the kitchen. She poured him some juice. "How did you sleep?"

"I slept real good," he said. He ate breakfast, and then went out to the barn with her. She had put off feeding the chickens so that he could do it with her. This time he showed no fear. He fed them, Ida thought, as though he had never been afraid. That day he fed the hens twice, fed the sheep, giggling; learned to milk, which chore he took very seriously; and sat in his treehouse before dinner.

The days resettled into a routine for Ida; Arlin, of course, made a difference. She was surprised and thankful at how rapidly he seemed to adapt to farm life. After two weeks he had taken over practically all her chores. He fed the animals, watered the horses and swept out the barn. One day he cleaned out the loft, another day he helped Frank repair the columbine. Sometimes he went out into the fields for the day. He seemed content. The only thing that worried Ida was that he had no friends. "It must be awful lonely for him out here," she said to Mrs. Grimm on the phone. "I guess it will improve once school starts."

"Arlin's quite used to being alone," Mrs. Grimm said. Ida could hear her light a cigarette. "He apparently made some friends at school; at the reformatory, that is, but was never that popular with his peers. I wouldn't worry unless he is."

Ida did worry, though, and she felt relieved, some days later, when she heard Arlin talking on the telephone. At least, she thought, there was someone he could talk to besides herself and the hired men.

She was glad to see, too, that Ed and Arlin were warming up to each other. Arlin seemed to grow fonder

and fonder of Ed as the days passed. Ida wondered if Arlin were experiencing what the book termed an "adolescent crush" on Ed. Arlin seemed unwilling to let Ed out of his sight. If Ed went to town on a Saturday, Arlin asked to go with him. When Ed mentioned something that he had to do, such as sharpen the scythe, Arlin asked to help.

Arlin's clear admiration for him seemed to cause a change in Ed also. He was more pliant, Ida thought, looser. He laughed more and seemed far more relaxed. He was impressed with Arlin's quick adaption to farm life. "You should see him at the market," he told Ida. "Telling folks how to mix a better chicken feed. Becoming a regular little farmer. Drove the tractor all alone."

All in all the liking was mutual, she thought. Whenever Ed had something special to do he called on Arlin to help him. They polished Ed's rifles together, looked at Ed's old stamp collection; and Ed taught Arlin to drive the pickup. Arlin became an expert at darts and taught Ed; Ed taught Arlin to play dominoes.

Sometimes Ida thought she sensed a restlessness in Arlin, but she never asked about it. He rarely talked about his life in the city, or his mother, but once he asked Ida for a stamp so he could write to her. He got phone calls from other boys occasionally, but no mail. He gained some weight. He painted his treehouse. He read *Gulliver's Travels* twice, Ida noted with satisfaction, although he disdained *The Hardy Boys* for being "fat sissies." He stopped smoking.

Once Ida asked him if he missed the faster life he must have had in the city. It was late on Saturday night and he seemed restless. He had turned the television on and off; had picked up a book and put it down. She asked him point blank, "Arlin, do you sometimes miss, well; being in the city, your friends and all?"

Arlin appeared to consider the question seriously. Finally, he said. "Not really. I didn't have so many friends at home, you know. Nah. It's OK here."

Ida realized that that was probably the highest compliment he could pay her. He never talked much. Ida realized that it wasn't a question of "assimilation" as Mrs. Grimm called it; it was just his way. There was only one thing about him that bothered her, now that she had gotten used to his eyes, and that was the fact that she could not

remember ever hearing him call her by name. He didn't seem to call her anything, not ma'am, or Mom, or even Mrs. Appleton. She was too shy to ask him about it.

One night, after Arlin had been with them about six weeks, they were at dinner when they heard a car drive down the hill that led to the house. "Who's that?" Arlin put his fork down.

"Maybe Mrs. Grimm," Ida said. "She said she might stop by."

Ed rose and peered out the window. "Not her car," he said. He remained standing. They heard two car doors slam, a male voice. Then there was a long pause, then a metallic clank, then the shuffle of footsteps walking toward the door.

"Can't make them out," Ed said.

The door opened and three people came in. Ida saw Ed's body tense. One of the people said, "Hey Arlin."

Ida stared. There were three boys, who all seemed about Arlin's age. All of them were bigger. One, who had said hello to Arlin, was a tall black boy in a denim jacket. He carried an enormous radio on a strap slung over his shoulder. He wore jeans and black boots. He wore a hat. The other two appeared to be Spanish, or Latin, Ida thought, at any rate. They, too, wore denim jackets and jeans. One of them, Ida noticed, had only two fingers on his left hand. Ida didn't like to judge people right off but she felt a tint of menace color the air. "Arlin," she said nervously, "do you know these boys?"

"Don't you guys ever knock?" Ed asked. Ida looked at Arlin. He was staring hard at the boy who had spoken as though, Ida thought, he were trying to say somethng without speaking, with his eyes.

"I guess." Arlin looked at his plate.

"Hey Arlin, aren't you going to ask us to sit down?"

"Arlin," Ed said sharply, "Do you know these boys?"

"I guess."

"He knows us." This came from one of the Spanish boys. He was grinning.

"Hey," the one with two fingers said, looking around. "This is a pretty nice place."

Ida looked at Ed. He was still standing, hands palm down on the table. She wondered what to do. These looked like the kind of boys who mugged people on televison.

"Would you want to sit down?" she asked faintly.

"Wait a minute," Ed said.

"Wait for what?" the black one said roughly.

"Look," Ed said. "I think you boys better leave."

"Awwwww," one of them drawled.

"Arlin," Ida said.

"Arlin," she was mimicked.

"OK," Ed said firmly. "Real nice to meet you. Goodbye."

"Arlin, who are these people?" Ida asked.

"Some guys I know. That one's Skeeter," Arlin pointed to the black boy.

"No names," the boy said.

Ida felt a tendril of fear curl in her stomach.

"We're just paying a friendly visit," Skeeter said. All three laughed. Skeeter leaned against the kitchen counter, carefully placing his radio on its top. He stuck his hands in his pockets and surveyed the kitchen. "Yeah. Pretty nice place." He looked down at the table. "Feed you well, huh, Arlin. Better than at Hunter." Hunter, Ida knew, was the name of the state reformatory. She swallowed, tensed her hands around her napkin.

"What do you want?" Frank asked.

"Which one here is the husband?" Skeeter asked. "Or do both of you share her?" They laughed.

"Frank, you want to help me get rid of some vermin that just crept in," Ed said, staring at Skeeter. "You can't—"

"Yes we can," Skeeter said calmly. "You sit down." Ed and Skeeter stared at each other. Ida put a hand over her heart, foolishly, she thought, trying to calm its beating.

"You sit down," Skeeter said again.

"No one tells me to sit down in my own house."

"I'm telling you. Do it." Skeeter smiled.

Sit down, sit down, Ida thought, hoping Ed would pick up the wave of her thoughts. Ed looked at her and sat, slowly shaking his head.

"Kay Arlin," Skeeter said again.

"Arlin do you know what these guys want?" Ed asked patiently. "Are they friends of yours?"

"Course we're friends of his," Skeeter said.

"I want them out of here," Ed said.

"Hah. We came a fucking long way to see Arlin." The other two nodded. Skeeter reached across Arlin and picked up a chicken leg. He handed it to one of the other boys. Then he handed a baked apple to the other one and helped himself to a cob of corn.

"Please pass the butter," he said mockingly to Arlin. Arlin looked at Ida for a second then reached and handed Skeeter the butter. Skeeter slowly ran the stick of butter over the corn until it melted and dripped onto his jeans.

"Out," Ed said.

"Kay," Skeeter said. He burped. "This is what's going to happen. First, you all gotta stay in here and keep quiet. I mean, shut the fuck up." He grinned at Ida. The whites of his eyes and his teeth contrasted brightly with his skin. In a way, Ida thought, it was kind of pretty. His lips, though, were chapped and torn, the bottom one caked with blood. "We're going to take a look around the house a and help ourselves."

"Help yourselves to what?" Ed said. "The hell you say."

"Man I told you to shut up and I meant you especially. I don't like you." Skeeter looked hard at Ed.

"Out," Ed said. His fists clenched on the table.

"Look boys," Frank said calmly, "you're going to get in a lot of trouble for this and you're going to get Arlin in trouble. Why don't you just leave now and we won't say anything to anyone."

"Come on, man," the boy with two fingers said. He paced around the kitchen. "Let's go."

"Just a second," Skeeter said. He finished his corn, threw the cob over his shoulder. It landed on the floor. The others laughed.

"I'm going to turn on this radio," he said, reaching back and pulling the radio onto his lap. "You all are going to sit here real quiet and listen to it. I'm going upstairs. With Sammy there. Whoops." He grinned. "Forget I said his name." Sammy, Ida thought. Skeeter and Sammy and Twofingers. She had wondered before what she would do if ever they were robbed. She wanted to go into the dining room and hide her mother's silver candlesticks, the ones that were on the table. "You all are going to stay here while my partner and I and Arlin take a look around the palace. Ain't no point trying to get away, there's nowhere

to go. Your truck won't work because I have the distributor. That old heap won't work either, that Chevy, cause I have the battery." One of the other boys giggled. Ida saw Frank turn a mottled red color, thinking, she figured, of his batteryless Chevy. Skeeter grinned very widely. "Also, we're prepared people. We don't go busting into people's houses without some kind of protection. Oh no. See, I got this." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a long knife encased in a sheath. "It's not a switch blade," he explained as he removed the knife from the sheath. "I save that blade for real special occasions." It was, Ida could see, nonetheless a very real knife, very long and slightly curved at the tip. She shivered. She focused her eyes on the blade of the knife and it seemed at once a deadly thing and a benign thing; something that could kill her, but also something she might use to slice cucumbers. It was impossible to stop looking at it.

"My friends here," Skeeter continued, "have what you might call comparable weapons." He smiled. He likes the phrase, Ida thought. "Comparable weapons," he repeated.

"You boys are wasting your time," Ed said roughly. Ida looked at his hands. The knuckles were white where they gripped the table. "There's nothing here of any value."

"That's not what we heard," the boy called Sammy said in a sing-song voice. Twofingers snickered.

Ed looked at Arlin, disbelief widening his eyes. It seemed to Ida that his eyes might pop right out of their sockets. "You set this up? You told them to come here?" His voice cracked on the last word.

Arlin, looking at the table, shook his head, no.

"You little brat, answer me!" Ed shouted.

As Arlin looked up Skeeter said "Shut up." He said it very quietly and it seemed to Ida that the very quietness of his voice enforced the order more effectively than if he had shouted.

"Let's stop talking and go," Twofingers complained. He walked around the kitchen until he was standing behind Ida. She tensed, sensing but not seeing the form behind her. She hated that, when someone approached her from behind. Like most animals, she thought. Dislike of being approached from the rear. She felt a sweaty palm on the back of her neck and she jumped, hunched her

shoulders. "Hey old lady," Twofingers said.

"Get your hands off her and get out of here," Ed said. His voice sounded to Ida like mixing gravel.

Twofingers tightened his grip for a second, then let go and laughed. "Come on," he said. "Let's do it."

"Sammy, you come with me," Skeeter said. "Shit, did it again. Oh well. Maybe it won't matter if you know our names." Ida did not want to think about what that could mean. "Me and, uh, my friend here are gonna go and cruise your lovelv home. Just browsing, of course. We don't want to buy nothing." He laughed, jerking his head. "Come on," he said to Sammy. Skeeter rose, turned on his radio, turned up the volume. Loud music—disco music, Ida believed—erupted into the kitchen.

"Christ," Frank said, putting his hands over his ears.

"You don't like it?" Twofingers asked. He began to dance in place, snapping his fingers to the rhythm. Ida looked away, embarrassed.

"You'll get to like it," Skeeter said. He winked at Ida. She looked away from him, then didn't know where to look. "Let's go," Skeeter said. "You all be good now. I promise you that if you aren't my buddy here will take care of you. He may have only two fingers but you don't ned five to shut up a bunch of old people." He looked down at Arlin who was still staring at the table. "You ready, farmboy?"

Arlin looked up. "Skeeter," he said, "Maybe—"

"No, man, no maybes. You come on now." Without looking at any of them Arlin rose and led Sammy and Skeeter out of the kitchen. Ida saw that Ed and Frank, as they watched Arlin leave the kitchen, both clenched their hands; they seemed to have fury smashed onto their faces. "You all relax," Twofingers said, and he laughed. The three of them sat at the table without moving. Frank and Ed had bowed their heads and she had the feeling they were trying to communicate covertly with their eyes. "Get down, lady, get down, get down," Twofingers sang.

Ida strained her ears, trying to hear the footsteps of the other boys through the music. Frank had picked up his butter knife and was drumming it on the table. Twofingers switched off the radio.

"Skeeter tell me to leave the music on," he said, sitting on the stool Skeeter had vacated. But I rather talk to you

nice farmer folks." He laughed and looked up at the ceiling. Then he looked at the table. "You eat dinner like this every night? Or just since Arlin come, you try and fatten that boy up?" No one answered. "Come on, man, I ask you a question. Don't you know a question when you hear one? I ask you do you eat like this all the time?"

There was a silence and then Ida said, "We grow our own food."

"Well, ain't that fine." With his right hand he caressed the stump of his missing little finger. "You scared?" he asked suddenly. "Come on, tell me." Pause. "Shit. I know you scared. People always scared. Last person, Mr. Brodie, he was so scared he wet his pants. He look around to find some weapon to use. Then he realize that's stupid, or he too weak to use a weapon, or he too fucking scared to use any weapon. Then he get real scared. He know he can't do nothing, nothing at all. So he just sit there like a little fucking baby all stiff like, he say, help yourself, take anything you want. He fucking afraid," Twofingers chortled. He sounded satisfied but also, Ida thought, as though he were speaking on another plane, not to them, really, but to someone or something else. "So fucking scared he couldn't see straight."

"You like to scare people, huh?" Frank said calmly.

The boy grinned. "How you know that?"

"Lucky guess."

"You sure a lucky man. You the husband?"

"No," a growl from Ed.

"You just work here," the boy said. Then he leaned over and winked at Frank. "Ya fuck her?" he asked, very softly.

Ida inhaled quickly and heard Ed do the same. Twofingers' words hung in the air like smoke, and then, thinking of smoke Ida smelled something burning. The apples. She had put more in the oven to bake and now they were burned and probably dripping onto the rack, down into the flame.

"The apples are burning," she said to Ed. Ed looked at the boy.

"Can she get up and turn off the oven?" he asked, between his teeth.

"I'll turn it off." Keeping his eyes on Ed, Twofingers edged over to the oven, located the knob, turned it off.

Smoke was beginning to stream from the oven door. A burned smell filled the kitchen like his music had filled it a while ago.

The little brat, Ida thought, suddenly angry. She hated to burn food. She clenched her teeth and the tears she had felt stinging her eyes receded.

"Fucking stinks," the boy muttered. He opened the door to the kitchen and shut it, opened and shut it, eliminating some of the smoke. Outside air wafted in. Ida shivered. "See, I know how to do things like get rid of a bad smell." Laughed. "Shit. I spent my whole life getting rid of bad smells."

"Look," Ed said sharply. "There's no point to this. You're going to get caught."

"Nah." He sat down on the stool.

Ed drummed his fingers on the table, then stopped. Ida was wondering whether the boy was sick or high. His eyes would shift out of focus intermittently, his laugh sounded unnatural, and he laughed erratically, as though amused at something private that was going on inside his head. Also, he would, at times, stare intently at the ceiling or a place on the wall. Perhaps, Ida thought, he was seeing something they could not see.

"Did Arlin set you up to this?" Frank asked casually.

"Maybe," said Twofingers. Enjoying himself, Ida thought. "Just maybe. Ain't for you to know. Don't you worry none about Arlin. He all right."

"No," Ida said, "I don't think Arlin would do that."

Twofingers smiled at her and walked over behind her again. She felt a full shudder in her shoulders, the hairs on the back of her neck quivering. "What do you know?" he said softly, touching her neck.

"So help me," she heard Ed's thick mutter, saw him rise, and then, suddenly, the boy moved away from her, moved violently toward Ed; there was a noise, a movement, and then Ed was slumped in his chair holding his hand up to his mouth. Ida saw blood seeping though his fingers.

Why, he's cut, she thought. She was aware of no fear, just surprise. It occurred to her that she rarely saw Ed bleed. Silently, she handed him her napkin. "Your shirt, Ed. Blood will stain."

She saw Frank look at her. She remembered why Ed was bleeding and looked at Twofingers. He was sitting on

the stool again, quietly laughing to himself, stroking the stump of his little finger with his right hand.

"Where's Arlin?" Frank asked.

"Don't you worry none about Arlin. He's gone with Skeet and my friend to do a little shopping. Arlin cool. Arlin something else. He's a good man. One time at Hunter Arlin beat someone up, a dude who tried to make it with him. You know, a fag-got." He pronounced the word delicately, like Ed when he talked about earworms. Ed called them "cornslugs," despised them for barging in and destroying his corn, and spoke about them with the same delicate distaste with which this boy spoke of homosexuals.

"The dude tried to get Arlin in the shower." Twofingers inserted a finger in his mouth and prodded his back teeth. "Old Arlin didn't do nothing, just punched the guy real hard and fast, in the stomach. Then Arlin leave the bathroom, he come to me and Skeeter, tell us what happen. Arlin real mad, busting a gut, you know? But he don't do nothing. He just wait. And he wait and wait and wait. This dude forget he ever tried to screw Arlin at all. He play baseball, you know, and hang out with them other queers. Then out of the blue, one day we playing basketball, and Arlin pounce on this guy; shit, I mean, he pounce, just like them cougars on TV pouncing down on a deer from a tree; he jump on this guy and start to beat the shit out of him. This dude dripping blood all over the basketball court, and we telling Arlin, kill the motherfucker. But then, real sudden like, Arlin stops. He turns the dude over, and this dude moaning and stuff, and Arlin wipe away the blood, he ask the guy is he all right, and when the dude just moan some more Arlin goes and gets the counselor, he says, 'Hey, Mr. Mancewicz, I practically kill this dude, you better take him to the infirmary, you know. I might have hurt him.' And we all look at Arlin like, this guy is crazy, but he OK. Arlin cool. Don't you worry about old Arlin."

"Could I get some water?" Ed asked, his voice furry. "Got all this blood in my mouth."

"Get him some water," Twofingers said to Frank. Then he reached into the pocket of his jacket and pulled out a gun. Ida stared at it. It was a metallic blue color. She had never seen such a small gun. She had an urge to laugh. It was so tiny it looked like a toy. She wondered why he

hadn't produced it earlier. Probably his trump card, she thought. Save the best for last.

"You like my gun?" he asked her. Then he stuck out his tongue, wiggled it at her, flashed a quick look at Ed. Ed was washing his mouth out in the water Frank had brought him and spitting out bloody saliva into his soupbowl. Ida felt sick, experienced a strong urge to vomit, then swallowed and held it in. Her legs were numb.

She heard voices in the hall, then Skeeter and Sammy walked in. Skeeter was carrying Ida's matched plaid suitcases, both of which were zipped. Sammy went over to the counter, singing under his breath. Skeeter watched Ed spitting blood into his bowl. "What happened?" he asked Twofingers.

The boy shrugged. "He got fresh."

Skeeter looked at Ed again. "It's smoky in here."

"Fucking apples burn up."

"Shit, Honch, you let her dinner burn up? Shame on you." Skeeter walked over to the oven, opened the door, lifted out the apples and dumped them on the floor. Each apple made a soft squishy sound as it fell. With his foot Skeeter smeared them around on the linoleum. Sammy snickered.

Skeeter, Sammy, Honch, Ida thought. Radio, two fingers, gun, knife, black, spanish, jeans, Skeeter, Sammy, Honch. "Where's Arlin?" she asked.

"Oh . . . Arlin's busy."

"Don't you worry about Arlin," Honch said, for what Ida figured must be the fiftieth time. But she saw him look questioningly at Skeeter as though he, too, wondered about Arlin.

"What are you going to do now?" Frank asked. He sounded scared, Ida thought. She looked at Honch's gun.

"I thought we might take a ride through that nice vegetable garden outside," Skeeter said. He laughed. "Shut up," he said in a different tone. "Honch, Sammy, come one out here to the dining room for a minute. Don't none of you try anything stupid. We got our eyes on you." He looked at each of them. "Which one's the husband?" Honch pointed at Ed. "You try to mess around with his old lady?" Skeeter laughed. Honch belched. "We're going to step into your lovely dining room for a second," Skeeter said. "Forget the phone. It doesn't work anymore. I'm

gonna have my eyes on you and if even one of you moves there's going to be pieces to scrape up."

"Could I clear the table?" Ida asked. It had occurred to her that the dishes must be done. She hated having crumbs on the table after she ate. Even though she had hardly eaten at all, she reflected, she wasn't even hungry. She saw that none of them had eaten much. The boy Skeeter, though, he seemed to have eaten a lot of food. Gravy, milk, butter, were spilled onto the table, dried out. "The table," she said.

"Nah," Skeeter said.

As the three of them convened in the dining room Ida heard their stifled whispers. One of the, she couldn't tell if it was Sammy or Honch, said "up in the bedroom." Ida strained to hear. Then Frank whispered, "I'm going to try and get out of here."

"No," Ed whispered. He had stopped bleeding. His mouth was bruised and swollen. "Bad idea."

"I'm not going to let—" Frank started but just then Skeeter came back into the kitchen. Ida heard a clank from the dining room and figured they were packing her grandmother's silver candlesticks. She felt a yearning for the silver, for its tarnished warmth, and then felt sick again. She breathed a few times and felt all right. She wondered what effect this would have on her heart.

"Get up," Skeeter said. None of them rose. "I said to get up." Ida stood. She was dizzy for a moment and gripped the edges of the table. Ed and Frank rose slowly. "Come on," Skeeter said. He herded them out of the kitchen like a cowhand herding bulls, Ida first. She followed a silent Honch up the stairs. As she walked through the house she took an inventory of what they had taken. Some inexpensive little statues; Ed's Toby Mugs; some valuable china. The silver drawer was practically empty. Vases. The candlesticks. Honch led them into the guest room, where three chairs were placed facing the windows. Ida wondered if the last view she would have of life would be of the fields. She wouldn't mind that. "Sit down," Skeeter said. "Woman in the middle."

"Why don't you—" Frank started to say. Then he closed his mouth.

"Shut up," Skeeter said. "Sit down." Ida sat. She found it was impossible to lean back in the chair; she was too tense. She noticed that Frank and Ed also sat straight up.

She heard movement behind her, then hands pulled back her wrists. She sat back quickly before he could touch the rest of her. His hand lightly touched her stomach.

"Hey, bitch," Sammy said lightly. He softly touched her stomach, then with hard jerky movements which hurt her joints he tied her to the chair, tied her wrists and ankles so tightly she wondered if the blood could circulate. Ed and Frank were being tied also, one by each boy. Then all three stepped back to admire their work. Ida could see the reflection in the window; the three prisoners (her hair was incredibly mussed), and the three boys standing behind them. She wondered if they had set it up that way so they could watch the three struggle from behind.

"Some weak old men here," Skeeter said scornfully. "Don't even resist." Ida clenched her fists against the rope. "You all sit tight," Skeeter laughed. "I'm serious." Ida began to pray.

The three boys left. Ida heard them go down the stairs, heard them clanking around in the kitchen. She traced their footsteps as they walked through the dining room and hall, into the front hall where the footsteps paused. She heard the mumble of their voices. The front door slammed. The steps walked all the way around the house. She wondered whether they were leaving. She heard no car motor; a silence, then the creak of the barn door, its woody thump as it shut. She wondered what they were doing in the barn, if one of them was still in the house. She strained her ears. She heard the clock ticking in the bedroom, heard Frank's slow breathing, Ed's gustier breathing. She turned to look at them. The ropes bit into her wrists. Ed and Frank turned at the same time. Ida watched their three heads move in the window.

"Where's Arlin?" Ed whispered.

"I'm going to kill him," Frank said. Ida looked closer. He was crying. "Hell," Frank said. He tossed his head, unable to use his hands to wipe the tears. For awhile his sniffling was the only sound she could hear. Then she heard an odd sound out in the hall, as though something were being dragged along the floor, accompanied by a bumpy noise as though something were knocking on the wall. She thought of coffins, bodies, bales of hay. The door to the room opened. She held her breath and watched the window. The sound stopped. She looked hard at the

window.

In the reflection she saw Arlin enter the room. His whole face seemed to be smeared with black. She realized, as she peered harder into the glass, that it was blood. She blinked. He came into the room. He dragged one leg behind him. The dragging sound in the hall. He carried Ed's automatic rifle. It must have bumped on the wall as he limped down the hall. There must be bloodstains on the wall, on the floor. Arlin in the window stopped. He wiped away some of the liquid from his eyes. He walked into the corner by the dresser, set the gun against the wall, took off his shirt slowly and wrapped it around his head. He wiped his face again. Ida could see his face more clearly now, but still, in the reflection, it was blurry. The figure in the glass picked up again.

He's going to kill us, Ida thought, without surprise. She regretted, for a moment, not sticking with babies. Then the thought of her death rushed back, with the horrible realization that her foster son was going to execute it, and she could no longer keep the sick down. She held it all in her mouth, and when she was done retching, spit it onto the floor, grimacing, hating the taste. Arlin in the window loaded the gun.

"Arlin," Ed said. Ida thought his voice seemed very far away. It was odd, how distant Ed's voice was while the ropes around her wrists seemed very large and present. She couldn't stop imagining ropes, brown, thick twine curled around her ankles, her wrists, curled and twisted and dangling little hairs, and all tied into a lumpy knot pressing on her veins.

"Shhh," Arlin said. He crouched in the corner, partially obscured by the dresser. He held the gun like a baby in his arms.

"Arlin," Ed said again.

"Wait," Arlin said. He stayed in the corner,rocking with the gun. After a long silence during which she visualized ropes, Ida heard the crunch of footsteps outside. They walked by the house, stopped near the front. She heard the front door open, then close. Footsteps clicking on the floor downstairs, then three sets of footsteps climbing the stairs. In the reflection the door opened. The three of them stood in the door frame. "We stay out here Sammy," Skeeter was saying. Skeeter grinned into the room, into the

window. "I can't watch this part," he said mockingly. The door shut and Honch approached the three slowly from behind. His gun glinted in the window. Ida saw Arlin stiffen, saw the rifle he cradled stop moving. Honch seemed dizzy, tipsy almost, and appeared not to see Arlin in back of him, crouched in the corner by the dresser.

"Who goes first?" Honch hummed. His voice was high pitched and Ida thought he walked on his toes. He stood directly behind them, placing himself neatly in the center of the reflection. Ida thought it looked like a painting. "Who goes first? Who has the best story, who's gonna beg the nicest to be saved, hmmm? Mr. Brodie, he say I give you $10,000 you let me live." He raised the gun, examined it, lowered his arm again. "I don't want money." He started to giggle. Ida strained away from him. The ropes hurt her legs. She thought about the sheep and pigs; they hadn't been fed, and who would do the milking in the morning? The cows would leak all over and then Ed would have to clean out the barn. Or maybe Arlin would do it. Her eyes moved. Arlin was holding the rifle out in front of him. I'm going to die, Ida thought. The thought didn't bother her that much; she just wished they could get it over with. She could not take her eyes off the little gun Honch held in the reflection.

"I think you," Honch to said to Frank. "You, you, you," and Honch took a step toward Frank, held up the gun smiled at Ida in the window and cocked the gun.

Then everything happeded at once. Ida saw Arlin rush out and heard a yell; an enormous blast knocked her chair off balance and she fell forward onto the floor, on her forehead, and could not roll out of the position; like a beetle on its back, she thought; and she heard thumps as the room was rushed into, then two more blasts that made her head ring; a scream, sounds of falling, a burning smell; Frank next to her, on his side, crying hard; blood in her mouth, her own blood; the sudden vivid nearness of Honch's left hand, right near her eyes, smooth stumps instead of fingers, motionless; a moan, the musical shatter of glass, ragged breathing; a silence, but for that breathing; a final little bump as Frank's chair found a resting place. Arlin kneeling by her, shirt red around his head. "Ida, Ida," he said. It was the first time Ida had heard him say her name in all the time he had lived with them. "I didn't

do it, Ida, honest, I didn't. I told them not to, Ida, please . . ." He untied her hands, smearing his blood onto her arms, her legs. He untied her feet. Then he passed out.

Images (Excerpts)

Carōl Marks

I.

Arlin's mother standing in the hall. Wearing a faded pink quilted robe on which the seams have opened to expose wispy grey bunting. The robe hangs unevenly about her knees. Nylon stockings squeeze a tight bracelet around the flesh above the calf. Between the hem of the robe and the top of the stockings two wrinkled mounds of kneeflesh bulge. A wide run zippers the inside of one stocking. The run extends down all the way along her foot. Protruding through the end of the run, the long snaky big toe, the toenail curved like a beak. Her head cocked, the ends of black hair touching only one shoulder. Not wearing glasses, she squints. She has applied orange blush to her cheeks, but unevenly, so her mouth appears twisted. One foot in front of the other, she stares at Arlin as though she were about to take a step. The mother, when standing, always appears as though she were about to move, caught in that second between immobility and motion, shoulders tensed, head tilted; but the truth is, she moves rarely. She stays at home mostly and dangles yarn in front of the cat, and scratches at the dirt on the windows. Now, watching her son. Her fingers trembling.

II.

Arlin gazes steadily over her shoulder. He stares at a flaky patch on the wall where the water pipes have caused the plaster to shred. Not blinking, his eyes are like chips of petrified rock, a queer lion-yellow color, with red, brown and glints of green webbing the irises. He stands with the rigid impatience of adolescent boys, one small hand clutching the glass doorknob. He is fully wound and tense, standing on the balls of his feet. The shoelaces of his sneakers have been threaded in parallel lines up the sides rather than criss-cross. He is dressed like any boy in any city, but all the same, there is something unnatural about the angle of his chin; its rigid jut and the straining neck

tendons; and in the way he holds his other hand out in front of him, palm facing out, shoulder level, parallel to his body.

Neither the woman nor the boy move. They stand two yards apart in a dark high-ceilinged hall that smells of sour butter and is adorned only by a cat litter box in the corner. Then Arlin in one motion opens the door, turns and slips out, and the door closes and is pulled shut; Arlin's feet echo thumps down the wooden stairs. Inside the mother blinks once and then sighs; and outside, Arlin runs down the sidewalk, fluttering leaves and pigeons as he jogs into the park.

Alaskan Fisherman

No one knows if he
remembers Italian streets,
the Venetian light we
danced beneath
during Carnevale
Icy Alaskan mornings
leave little space
for nostalgia.
By now his beard is frosty
and hard work
barely begun.
His hands tie more
than rope, while
winter and salt
pass unspoken.
There are days spent
untying whatever else
was left intended, while
behind, we remain
between porticoes and Venice,
loose uneven pearls
to be gathered by nets
and strong fishermen.

Ann Colantuoni

Snow

To imagine you is to gather reins
Trapping leaves in a great river

I carry them back to the depths of my life
Where the choir of history forever repeats
Confetti of a fire gone mad

Solace has fallen away from my sleep
The recourses seem black or white
Like icicles they hang from my 'dreams'

To see you is to imagine reins
Becoming a river out of my reach

"Nothing stays" says the riverfisher
"My house is a winter held at sea
Where leaves and water are the same"

Tory Dent

Not Black and White but Cream and Brown

If we had children their skin
would be coffee ice cream,
their eyes, dark vanilla bean
and their hair woolen coils like yours
not, like my mother's, egg gold and thin.

You are rich and pleasing like earth
or walnut wood that's polished and smooth.
I am unbleached muslin flecked with brown,
grass dried in sun.

When we sleep by the blue clock light,
I, blue as stained glass,
reflect the light which you take in your
deep mauve, plum brown arms.

Melody Davis

East Haven

Winter lumbers east of town

near to the water where, with the summer houses
boarded up,
dawn is its most bewildering.

Even the street is dimensionless as a red stair.
The people, the sunrise, the library,
all seem pinned to a single sheet.

A new life is coming behind you:
white bulbs are given to a table
their spines longer than a man's head—
white bulbs animated by infant mouths—
and the anatomy of a woman is no different
from a child's.

You lean against your reflection in the mirror
like a canvas tilted upon an easel
and comfort yourself for walking outside yourself,
for remembering yourself as having flaws,
comforted by the flatness of light on your floor.

Tory Dent

The Archaeology of Silence

"I have not tried to write the history of that language,
but rather the archaeology of that silence."
Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

The problem lies in pauses and hesitations
or a sudden rush of the wrong words.
After all, few things are absolute,
I cover up the best I can.

I'm a guest in my mother's house.
I burrow through piles
of dishes, old clothes, books and photos.
I find change and a baby picture
of myself under the sofa.

Bobby watches me. He's four,
all long frail bones and thin skin
that breaks into bruises each time he falls.
My mother says, "I love him
even though he was an accident."

She's stopped reading. Books remind
her of my father. She tried to give
his to the library at Echelon Mall
but they were too old, too common.

Archaeological tools are simple:
short handled shovel, long handled shovel, pick,
narrow holed sieve, skin smooth brushes,
sandpaper. I cannot choose
the right one. I've watched people destroy
the most important evidence.

Last year my mother threw out
her house models: thin, polished
oak, roofs and walls met perfectly,
no cracks. She said they were worthless.

I would leave this place if I could spill
into a language I know.

I take clipboard and camera out of my pack
to describe this site precisely before I alter it.

My grandfather's paintings line the walls:
unsold portraits, dead relatives, vacations;
Each hangs at a different angle. I take down
one of me at 8 wearing a blue gum suit
and one of my grandmother walking in Pennypack park.

Linda spills her coffee, cracks
the ecology mug into green and white
shards. The stain spreads
from sofa to bookcase. Bobby cries,
I tell him, "No one's hurt, be quiet."

I don't believe words can transform
photographs into sculpture. I must leave
these stratified layers intact
but I cannot lift out the embedded artifacts
without disturbing dirt and rock.

I want to be rocked to sleep
but I have nightmares: I leave the earth, hover
near the peak of this cathedral ceiling, fall
through the picture window.
My grandmother says, "As you get older,
you must wake before you land."

My mother draws blueprints for ideal houses
on scrap paper. She hides her plans
under the kitchen table.

Are these artifacts individual possessions
or common property? I am afraid visitors
will crumble dirt into the fractures,
or destroy the history of layers.

Linda picks up the mug pieces
with a raggedy man's undershirt.
"I liked this cup, it made me feel political.