



crazyhorse

Number 71 Spring 2007



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GARY FINCKE

The Fierceness of Need

“This Khomeini fellow, what do those people over there see in him?” Sal Morrelli asked. For five minutes he’d been complaining to Ed Frank about his daughter Maria’s music—“All that what they call disco. Like dancing to a song makes it something special”—but suddenly he’d switched to politics as if the late March improving weather reminded him of bad news likely to come soon from the Middle East.

“From what I’ve heard,” Ed said, “the Shah was nasty.”

Morrelli shook his head. “I don’t like the looks of this guy. No matter what’s happened, you can’t have a church in charge of a country. There’s too much hate in the people who run churches, and that one doesn’t even have Jesus to calm things down.”

Although he’d never been inside the place, Ed knew Morrelli ran his own restaurant. He’d passed by it a hundred times, and from the outside it looked to Ed as if Maria’s hadn’t changed since Morrelli opened it in 1957, six years before the daughter he’d given the same name to had been born.

Ed and his wife Dana had lived near Middletown, where Maria’s was located, for three years without more than “Hello” from Morrelli over the fence that divided their yards. Morrelli

had put the fence up years ago to keep Maria in when she was young, and now, he said, he’d gotten used to it, and maybe Ed and Dana would appreciate a fence at the end of their yard some day when they had the little ones around. But ever since Morrelli’s daughter had started in Ed’s class at the high school, Morrelli called him over to talk whenever he saw Ed in the yard.

Maria was in tenth grade, the *Julius Caesar* year in English. She’d finished the *Romeo and Juliet* year and had *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* to go before graduation. During Ed’s three years at that high school just outside of Harrisburg, he’d taught all of those plays, and he knew it was hard doing Shakespeare in any of those years. He’d told Dana that Maria sat behind a boy who said he didn’t understand anything in *Julius Caesar*, not even the lines in prose spoken by the guards. “Why?” Ed had asked him, and he’d said, “Because it’s Shakespeare.”

“You thinking about starting a family?” Morrelli said now, leaving the Middle East behind, abandoned like the merits of disco music, jittery, Ed thought, from the coffee he always carried into the yard in a twenty-ounce “double cup” from the local doughnut shop. “You two aren’t babies anymore.”

“I’m thirty,” Ed said. “Dana’s a few months

younger.”

“You don’t want to be an old man when your kids need a firm hand,” he said.

“One of these days soon,” Ed said. He didn’t want Morrelli to be the first person he told that Dana was pregnant, news she’d given him the night before, telling him to wait a few days to spread the news. “It’ll be like a birthday present,” she said, since hers was April first, less than a week away, but she’d looked upset, even when he hugged her. “I had two glasses of wine last night,” she said. “I knew I shouldn’t because I was late.”

“It’s nothing to worry about.”

“Yes it is. I knew I had an appointment this afternoon. Everything matters now.”

Morrelli looked across Ed’s yard as if he was imagining children playing. “Look at me,” he said. “I’m forty-four, and Maria’s my only and about all I have the energy for.”

Morrelli’s daughter had dark red hair, the most beautiful hair of any girl in the school. Ed had mentioned that to Dana once, and she’d said, “That’s the sort of thing you’d better keep to yourself.”

“Who would I tell besides you?”

“Why am I the exception?”

“If you told me one of your fourth graders was cute,” he’d said, “I wouldn’t tell you to keep that to yourself,” and she’d glared like her mother did every time Ed criticized Republicans.

He’d kept himself from telling her he taught twenty girls who were more attractive. He wanted to say all those girls were fifteen or sixteen, that he was twice their age, for God’s sake. And he

hadn’t mentioned that Maria was dieting, that she’d lost weight in a way that he admired. He didn’t need Dana reminding him he couldn’t tell a female student who’d lost weight she was looking better, though actually, he wasn’t certain she did. Instead, he remembered how his Aunt Agatha had lost weight one summer, how she’d looked like a woman he didn’t know in a swimsuit, somebody to fantasize about for a few months before she pitched past that perfection to a thinness she kept under long-sleeved blouses and baggy pants.

She’d found out about the cancer before those two months of sudden beauty ended, taking six months to die, and now he watched Maria each day for whatever would tell him she was plummeting toward disaster.

The next afternoon, during his free period, Ed was reading the Wednesday *Harrisburg Patriot* in the faculty room when Will Watson, who taught history, pushed the door open and held the knob with one hand as if he expected everybody to pay attention. “You heard yet?” he said.

“What’s going on?” Ed said.

Will swung the door by the knob and looked from Ed to the three other teachers sitting on the old, black, fake-leather office chairs they’d salvaged when the administration had renovated the year before. “It’s not in the newspaper, that’s for sure,” he said.

Ed held the paper open, but he kept his eyes on Watson. “What?” he finally said.

Watson swung the door once more before he said, “Three Mile Island almost did a China

Syndrome. You saw the movie, didn't you? You know what I'm talking about."

A near meltdown, Ed thought. *Almost a hole through the earth from Harrisburg to China*. Everybody in the school knew it was six miles to the atomic power plant. "There's radiation?"

"They say 'no,' but something's happened over there, you can bet on that."

The school emptied fast, the buses half full because parents who'd heard the news had already shown up in cars, the line snaking back toward Harrisburg as it was pointing the way to the four towers on Three Mile Island. "You think we're having school tomorrow?" Ed asked Watson.

"The worst has already happened," Will said. "We're either fucked or we're fine."

Ed nodded. He'd spent the afternoon thinking that very thing about the baby Dana was carrying. By the time he arrived home, Dana, though the elementary school released a half hour later and she rode with another teacher who lived two blocks away, was already there. "Where were you?" she said.

"Blocked in by all the parents' cars."

It was a warm day, but he noticed Dana had the windows closed and the drapes pulled. "I didn't know what else to do when I got home from school," she said. "We're only seven and a half miles from that thing."

"Nothing escaped. They screwed up, but all the radioactivity was contained."

"So they say."

"Even if it wasn't, we're not at ground zero. There's thousands of people closer than us."

"My school's 6.3 miles away. Yours is closer than that. I feel like I've been kicked in the stomach."

She pointed up the stairs, and he followed her direction into the gloom. "The drapes are shut in our room," she said, "but do me a favor and close them in the guest room." He looked up the stairs a second time. "The door was already shut. I just didn't want to go in there because you can see the towers from that side of the house."

They'd planned to turn the guest room into a nursery. Dana had asked him to paint the walls a bright color and dismantle the old spare bed. He looked out the window at the towers. Men were working there right now, he thought, but there was no steam rising. The towers, which had always looked alien, looked predatory without a cloud rising from them.

"You can leave the bed in there now," Dana said when he came back downstairs. "There's the smaller extra room to make into a nursery. Let whoever visits look at those damned things, but not our child, not every morning first thing."

"We can decide that when this settles down again."

"It's decided," Dana said. "It's impossible now. Anything less than perfect is failure with your children." When he didn't answer at once, she added, "You agree, don't you?"

"There's bad luck," he said. "Hereditary."

"You sound like somebody getting ready for something terrible."

"I'm realistic."

"If the baby has a problem, I won't be able to forgive myself," she said. "Or you."

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CIARAN BERRY

Electrocuting an Elephant

Like mourners, or men setting out early for a duel,
they follow these six tons, this hunk of flesh,
muddy and whorled, this elephant they tried once to hang
because she'd killed three men and survived

their carrots laced with cyanide. Coney Island, 1903,
and the handheld camera that gets all of this down
is "a clock for seeing," as Barthes tells us it ought to be,
the image forever ticking over as three men,

in sepia and near-silhouette, step through a vacant lot,
follow the lead of the burly handler, who carries
a sleek whip, a coil of rope, as he leads his charge towards
the spot where they will set two of her feet

in copper shoes. Think of the boy, who sat in front of you
that year in school, led by the ear to the corner
of the classroom because he couldn't spell vengeance
after three turns. Think of the bull, three summers old,

pulled by the horns towards the place of sacrifice
so that bees might rise up out of its pooled blood.
And this too must be the way they took Bartholomew
after he made the king's brother deny *his* gods—

one guard gripping the prisoner's left arm and the three others,
who follow, unable to muster a single word
as they march down the main street of their village
towards the blue edge of the Caspian Sea,

where they will dispose of this son of Tolomai,
taking turns to open him with knives. What do they think of
as they skulk after the condemned, this trinity,
who are not quite men yet despite their gleaming uniforms,

or these others like characters from one of the first westerns
with their hats and moustaches, their say-nothing expressions
that barely make it beyond the ground sand of the lens
and onto this reel that unravels as I find myself

thinking again about that boy who, in *Scoil Mhuire*,
sat in the front row of those battered desks
with the defunct inkwells, the dry hinges that opened
into a box to store your books. This time he's reeling off

the names of birds. He makes a fist and hammers it
against his skull to bring forth robin redbreast, stonechat, crow,
while the rest of us raise our hands with what we think
are the right answers or hold our breaths trying hard not to laugh.

The truth is, I can't remember his name, only the way
his clothes reeked of stale milk and hay, and how
his father once tied a frying pan between the legs of their mongrel
to discourage it from running after cars. I'd like

to whisper this story into the ear of the keeper
before the film goes any further, before they reach
the spot where a crowd waits, impatient,
shifting from foot to foot. I'd like to tell him how,

after those four boys have done their dirty work
and turned into something older than they were before,
Bartholomew becomes that figure on the ceiling
of the Sistine Chapel who holds up a tanner's knife

and his own skin, another saint made patron
to those who wield the tools that worked his exit
from this world. And though it changes nothing,
I want to explain how, when the elephant falls, it falls

like a cropped elm. First the shudder, then the toppling
as the surge ripples through each nerve and vein,
and she drops in silence and a fit of steam to lie there
prone, one eye opened that I wish I could close.

QUINN DALTON

Jimmy the Brain and the Beautiful Aideen

I met Aideen on my first night working at Mike's Beer Mart—Mike was her husband. A freak October storm had iced everything over. I was stocking Schlitz when Aideen pulled into the drive-through. Their three kids were in back, the littlest in her car seat, the boys strapped in on either side, their sock-feet kicking the seatbacks. Mike came around the counter to greet them. "Don't let the kids out, hon, it's too cold," he said, and Aideen shook her head and winked at me, as if to say he didn't give her much credit. I liked her right away.

Mike hooked a thumb toward me. "He's going to do nights." While he leaned in the back windows to hug the boys, I introduced myself. I'd only just started an hour before—I'd gone a different way home from campus, and when I stopped in, Mike had asked me did I want to earn some extra cash.

"Well, what do you think?" Aideen asked me, eyebrows raised and lips pressed into a grin that said she wasn't all that concerned about my opinion. The place had been a body shop before. You could see where the hydraulic lifts had been ripped out and the holes filled with fresh concrete. It had rear and front metal garage doors. Instead of coming around to an outside service window, customers drove inside, where they could load

their own cars if they wanted and pay at the counter. But Mike had told me we should always offer to load for them. "Service, man," he'd said. "That's how we'll take over around here." There was a large beer and wine cooler on one side of the drive-through and smaller coolers for pop on the other. The twenty-proof liquor, the strongest stuff we were allowed to sell, he kept behind the counter along with the cigarettes.

"Looks fine to me," I said to Aideen. My father was laid off from Diebold and my mother stood in the kitchen a lot, washing dishes and whispering on the phone with her friends about who'd gotten the latest pink slip. Worry drew up her eyebrows like a bad facelift. As far as I was concerned, a job was a job.

Aideen was about to ask me something else when a guy came around the corner and pulled in behind her too fast, his tires squealing on the concrete as he braked. Mike straightened up, looking at him. Aideen checked him out in her rearview.

"You work here?" the guy yelled at Mike. He inched his car toward Aideen's bumper, bouncing the brakes.

"With you in a minute," Mike said, keeping his eyes on the guy an extra second before turning back to Aideen. The baby had started crying.

Aideen's eyes flicked back to her rearview again. "Don't forget the deposit," she said.

Mike leaned to kiss her but stopped short; she was already rolling. I went to get the King Cobra that the guy yelled for, and when he paid and pulled out, tires squealing again, Mike and I watched his headlights swing across the asphalt. In the silence afterward, I thought I could hear the ice expanding in the cracks, buckling the road.

But those first few weeks after the storm and before winter really set in were pretty nice. A chilly night breeze blew out the fumes, but you didn't even have to zip your coat to stay warm. The sky out front turned pink in the evening, and even though there wasn't a tree or a strip of green anywhere—across the street it was just a Quick Stop and a Wendy's—those sunsets made everything look better. There was a steady stream of customers, and Mike and Aideen always gave me free beer. I thought they had a pretty good gig going.

I worked with Aideen a lot because the rule was two people working the counter, and never more than one woman. Two men was ideal. When Aideen had to work, Mike scheduled me with her, because, as he said, "You're level-headed, not like most guys your age." He only had maybe ten or eleven years on me, but I guess he saw it in those terms: he was in one camp, and you were in another—and if you didn't know the difference, well, he did.

But then I pulled the same thing with Aideen a couple of weeks after I started. We'd figured out we were exactly ten years apart, same birthday even:

October fifth, which had just passed. Without thinking, I said, "I can't believe you're that much older."

I meant that she looked my age. I still hate to think of it, how she looked at me and then, realizing what I'd meant, started laughing. "Ten years is nothing," she said. "You'll see."

Then she told me about meeting Mike at Michigan State in the fall of 1980. It came down to a decision between two post-game parties, her roommate convincing her to go to one instead of the other. Mike and Aideen knew each other from high school, but meeting again in a new place triggered something between them, was how Aideen put it, and they fell in love. They stayed together even after Mike flunked out and had to live with his parents for a while, selling used cars, and for the next three years she finished school while he saved money for a big Ohio-style wedding—ten bridesmaids and groomsmen, the big banquet room at the downtown Holiday Inn—which her father could've paid cash-out-of-wallet for. But Mike was trying to prove himself because Aideen's father, a semi-retired Diebold exec, was none too happy about Aideen marrying Mike, even though Mike was from the right side of town and a former football player.

"We're used to sticking it out," she said then, and she looked over the counter as if the Beer Mart was just another example. She was about as beautiful as anyone I'd ever seen in person—long, almost-black hair, pale skin, and almond-shaped brown eyes, but also a roundness in her face that made her look soft and young. And she had a

good head for business as far as I could tell. The Beer Mart might have been Mike's idea, but she made things happen. She got a lottery machine through her father's connections, which probably pissed Mike off, but it brought in more business. And she ordered a big red neon sign to make the place stand out better from the road.

But when it was time to count the take and lock up, and I walked her to her car, she said, "Race you to Thirtieth." That's where the line was, where the streets got cleaner, the old Victorians a row of white cakes, no sagging, no rot. I saw it in her face, dashboard-lit and determined, how she gunned it out of the lot. She really was racing.

My family and I lived just over the line on Thirty-Second. She and Mike lived farther north in a bungalow at the edge of the richest neighborhood, where her parents lived. At that end of town, there's a pathetic, half-mile-wide lake where people ride their motorboats in tight circles during the short summers. There's a bar behind the docks with dark paneling and the usual mounted fish. This is what's known as The Club. Aideen told me she'd had her graduation party there; she was laughing, embarrassed, and I have to admit I wished I could've been there, but I knew I wouldn't have been invited anyway, even if I had been her age.

That winter was cold. Probably no worse than normal, but I felt almost every night of it, working with those huge open garage doors. Mike hung a space heater above the counter with chicken wire and jumper cables, which didn't do much except burn your scalp if you were tall, like me. It was

fine for Aideen, and even for Mike. He'd reach up and try to tilt the metal grill of the heater to warm us better. He'd say, "These are the kinks you gotta work out in the first year of business."

One night he told me how he'd gotten it started. "See, I paid attention," he explained. "There were drive-throughs all over town, especially by the campus, but not around here. The civic center's two blocks away and we're not far from downtown."

This seemed sharp to me at the time, but maybe Mike didn't notice how, behind the main drag, the rows of houses looked like crumpled paper. There was a halfway house in one direction and, sure, the civic center in the other, but those people bought their drinks inside, and when they left they headed north as fast as they could.

. . . continued in *Crazyhorse* Number 71

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

Big Piles of Nothing

Daniel M. Barringer “staked a claim on [Meteor Crater] in 1903. Barringer believed that the crater had been formed by a ten-million-ton meteor, heavily freighted with iron and nickel, and it was his confident expectation that he would make a fortune digging it out. Unaware that the meteor and everything in it would have been vaporized on impact, he wasted a fortune, and the next twenty-six years, cutting tunnels that yielded nothing.”

—Bill Bryson

For those on shore, the air’s as raw this year
 as last; for those submerged in the turbidly weedy water,
 it’s as dismissive of vision and clear acoustical sounding
 as ever. The same will be true next year, and the next, and
 Nessie will forever be a vague, chimeric neck-and-head
 of unprovable origin out in the waves of the loch; will be,
 elusively, a teasing trail of tiny baby-fart-in-the-bathtub
 bubbles that sing for a second and say if only
 one more month, if only one more chilly and difficult dive,
 if only one more squandered summer research grant . . .
 and someone finds the month; and the funds; and the wetsuit
 When her girlfriend said the guy she’d been seeing
 turned out to be “a big pile of nothing,” Gerta replied
 “Oh yeah? Check *this* out.” Thus began her saga

*

of the time she worked as a surveyor on the mock-up Martian sandflats
 NASA built in true-to-scale units outside of Houston,
 and there was this absofuckinglutely gorgeous terraforming engineer,
 and secret, sexy nights with him afloat inside the spacewalk chamber
 “He kept on promising me this wonderful future. Great, but what

he meant was rocket travel and stupid planet-crawler machines. I gave him a year of my life, plus throw in my career (I got fired on ‘moral grounds’), and he led me on, and he led me on, and I wound up one day weeping on top of some marinara-color rock alone on the surface of goddamn Mars.” *If only one more shared champagne in the shadow of one more fake space station* The Yeti: if only one more Himalayan expedition, *then, for sure*, a frozen tangle of fur in the corner of a cave will be the Grail, will be the Noah’s Ark, will open up its cryptozoological genetic code Hamlet’s buddies, staunch

*

and persevering on the watchwalks of the castle, were rewarded with a ghost. That makes good theater. But the seeker of the empirical proof of God; of a perpetual-motion engine; of the Fountain of Youth, and Bigfoot, and the fairy folk . . . the faithful awaiters of Barbarossa’s legendary return, and of the End Times, and (for one especially wan and bitter friend of mine) the Pulitzer Prize . . . they wear away to shadow on these pilgrimages lacking any shrine, the way it happens in that story where the starship slips off course, so now a dozen generations in its great hold have been traveling into emptiness; the way my mother poured herself into fraudulent cure after fraudulent cure of her sister’s cancer, every further medical promise enticing her out past the nebulae. Well, it’s this very

*

narrative—a man whose life is sacrificed in caring for his sister’s long-term illness, exactly as if he were a pill and her blood was a slow but determined dissolvent—that’s the substance of a novel published just last year

by my Pulitzer-lusting pal. His fourteenth; every one,
a torch of words; a raft-across-the-dismal-slough
of words; a quirky grace note. Will he ever win his prize?
The haruspex in me says no. And yet without
that dream beseeching him, *our* reading would be meagered.
We need to be lured—it turns our lassitude
into accomplishment. We need to be lured, and we need to disappear
completely into it—tithing of ourselves won't do.
“World peace.” The Roswell saucer crash. A “mortuphone”: to talk
with the dead. Meanwhile, everybody has a story

*

—a version. His (our engineer's) is: she beguiled him
across that surface of plasticized sand for a year of his life,
come take me, with the slurry wanton torch song of a tyro lorelei.
I'm waiting, and first she wasn't crazy about his family and so
he slowly weaned himself from them, *I'm open and waiting*, and then
she wasn't too too pleased with the financial package, *here*,
across this dune that looks as if it's painted with pizza sauce,
I'm dewy and impatient, and so he added extra fiscal bounce,
at every stage he diminished himself, at every new diminishment
he saw her with her plumb line and her sextant, *over here now*,
at the horizon, and then at the next horizon, taking
its measure, leading him farther, soon beyond the two moons,
over here, and into starry void, and into subatomic space
where “void” is born, and “space” is born, and Everything is Nothing.

CELESTE NG

Parallel

More than missing the pebbled leather of a basketball in his hands, more than waiting for people to open doors for him, or turn the pages of his book—it's the itching that bothers him most. Before the accident he had thought that a car crash was the worst thing that could happen: your car crushed like a soda can, your father or your mother dead, or both, yourself smashed and scarred into some kind of Elephant Man, in a wheelchair maybe, head lolling, mouth open and drooling. And now here he was, only a few scars on his back, still able to walk pretty well and talk and think, no drool. The car totaled but his mother and father fine. No one and nothing dead, not even the tree they'd hit, except his arms. They don't move, his fingers can't wiggle; they just dangle there in his lap. Everything fine but his arms, and the itching.

Say a fly landed on his knee, he could shake his knee and it would fly away. But say it doesn't fly away even when he bounces his leg. Or say a mosquito perches on his cheek and sips his blood before he knows it, say the bite pulses and begs for a fingernail across its swollen surface, just for a second, just to feel the hot relief spread like syrup across his skin. Or even the smallest things: a stray hair brushing the nape of his neck, an eyelash caught in the corner of his eye, a million tickles

and teases that begin to uncurl the moment you couldn't move your hands. He suffers in stillness. He won't twitch. At the physical therapist's office, the first and last time he went, he saw a row of accident victims convulsing in their wheelchairs, jerking limbs. They shuddered and spasmed at the back of his mind as the therapist explained why there was nothing she could do for him. *Inverse paraplegia*, she'd said. *Caused by bleeding in the central spinal cord. Treatment rarely successful.* Even after she said *permanent damage*, he was still pleased that he could walk out of the office smoothly, controlled, even if he was slow, even if his arms hung limp at his sides. If he itches now and his mother sees him fidget, she says, "Sam, Sam, what's the matter? Are you hurting?" He says no and clenches his jaw. He thinks of ocean waves, gusts of wind, things that sweep the skin clean, but the itch creeps into his field of vision and tints the world pink, then red.

So when he meets Amanda, this is how he knows. It's her first day on the job. They're in the middle of his math homework when she stops with her finger in *Beginning Geometry* and bends in, close to his face.

"Stay still," she says. "There's a bug on you." She reaches out with her other hand. Her skin doesn't even brush his cheek, but when she takes

her hand away there's a mosquito mashed between her fingers.

"Gross, huh?" she says. "You think about this problem. I'll go wash." She sets the book on the coffee table and he hears her head into the kitchen. It's a miracle, her prescience. He wants to lift his arm and touch his cheek, to remind himself that there is no bite, nothing but flat skin. He can't forget the smear of blood, like lipstick, on her fingertips.

Scribe is her official job, not tutor, since he's not supposed to need help with the learning. She's there to open his books for him, to record the answers he tells her, to write his name at the top of his homework sheets. She's a college student anyway, a freshman at the local university, not a real teacher, and only—he counts up—five years older than him. She doesn't look like a teacher, either; she wears gauzy blouses and dangling beaded earrings and chunky necklaces that look like polished gumdrops. But she's smart, and she's what they can afford.

At school there's someone else, a district-sponsored handler named Evan, who's trained to take notes for him and carry his things. Sam sits at his desk trying to gather up the theorems and formulas and themes, to pool them in the corner of his mind so that he can sift through them later, sort them out and make sense of it all. By the time Evan drops him off at home, though, everything's gone. They've trickled out in the lunch room where Evan feeds him his sandwich, bite by bite; they've scattered behind him as he makes his way

to his locker, where Evan dials his combination and takes out his books. That first day, when Amanda arrives after school and spreads Evan's notes in front of him, he can read the words but can't make sense of them, as if he's reading private letters between two intimate strangers.

"Let's go back a little," Amanda says. "Do you remember chords? Triangles? Angles?"

They're sitting side by side on the living room sofa, and she flips backwards through the notebook on his lap, turning pages left to right. He doesn't remember anything until the handwriting changes from Evan's wide script to his own thin print.

"Parallel lines," he says. "I got those."

Amanda looks at the date in the corner of the page. He doesn't look but he knows what it is. February 11. They've flipped back through a month's worth of notes.

She takes the notebook into her own lap and bends her head over it. Sam stiffens himself, waiting for what's coming: *Is this the day it happened? Oh you poor thing.* He rehearses the answers he keeps ready: *A patch of ice. Coming home from visiting my aunt in Toledo. Dad was. I don't know what kind of tree.*

Instead Amanda lifts her head, pushes her hair behind her ears.

"Parallel lines," she says. "It's been a while since I did this, but it's coming back. If you get parallel lines, the next section on angles is easy. Let's take a look." She spreads the notebook on the table and takes out a sheet of looseleaf. "Say our figure looks like this." She begins to draw, and he watches her hands move in harmony, the one holding the

pencil, the other turning the paper this way and that to accept the soft silver lines.

Before Amanda, his mother did the scribing herself. But it had to wait until after she got home, after she made dinner and put the pots in the sink to soak. Sam would watch TV until she came into the living room and sat down beside him with her damp apron still on.

“All right, Sammy,” she’d say. “Until the next commercial break. Then we’ll start.” She would loosen her hair and retie her bun, smoothing the sides with her fingers. One curl always stuck out, above her ear, like a knot breaking the surface of polished wood. When the commercials came on, she took the remote from the table and turned off the TV.

. . . continued in *Crazyhorse* Number 71

ELENA KARINA BYRNE

O Mouth Fable

What can be shown, cannot be said.

—Wittgenstein, from *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

It darkens in the bride
of God's groom, taking nouns
with it, intimate
dark part. Feeling part.

O Obedience like horse
trained to the bit, mouth made. Heresy. Here. Say
the mouthy to the bombast in secret.

Hum, Hem and Haw—
Pout, wry and yes, gift-horse it.

In yearn under the all-need: the language-place, vivid, vivid mirror,
piece
of content you wound, sound and feed. Keep
thou slurred vernacular oral, please.
The means to mouth, to put words into, is yours. Such rivering-red back-talk.

As laugh on the wrong side, wide open
head in the lion's, yes, a movable feast and equivalent silence where the heart
is.

Where it muffins, where bees
softly blunder, pass phrase for phrase. The mouth

gave rise to the legend of mourning, mother-sick. —And wit for the reply,
wet, still sexes first. —A mouth once
ante-roomed defiance and luck, spilled
its beans
all over the polished floor.

Spits the image back, spirits away animals and children: loophole—
now yarns a *cock and bull* story, rivers itself to its
sea—

we certainly there fable:

bazoo, muzzle, orifice, aperture, kisser,
she/he having, in
the open boat rowing of air, a sense of the world at bay,
a narrative of birds, swine-sow speech, a goldfish swim just under
the tongue —such slavery of taste, of hothouse—

O, still tells & tells the lies best of us.

ELENA KARINA BYRNE

After Stendhal: A Concordance on Leaving

Think that I am leaving you for a very long time . . .

put a little ballast into that head of yours . . .

ruin yourself. . . It doesn't take much to do this when you are used to lying

(*he found himself lying on the floor*), each lie like a cut leaf left behind
in *the Office of the Dead*

in their silk-padded drawers
with just a few special personal belongings
to help them transcend into all that crushed potpourri-nothingness
ahead, each lie

(a this) a carrying card to terror, *a horror of the unexpected and ridicule,*
an abundance of gravity.

Leaving is presence in past participle
everlasting.

I know, in moments like these, *I should address you in the vain language*
but indeed, *let us conceal our existence*

in each other and be alone *for a fresh weakness*

motionless and almost unconscious, as after long sex, leaving
the body by being in the body first, because

to think is to be full of sorrow

the moaning of the wind in the thick foliage of the lime

reeling and waking

and having to answer to yourself: *Ah, monsters! Monsters!*
The truth is austere.

This is my name now. Don't you see? You are he

and *he would have made an excellent King.*

Agha Shahid Ali
Ai

John Ashbery
David Baker
Robin Behn
Marvin Bell
Robert Bly

Christopher Buckley
Frederick Busch
Raymond Carver
Hayden Carruth

Billy Collins
Peter Cooley
Mark Cox
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Stephen Dobyns

Mark Doty
Norman Dubie
Andre Dubus
Stephen Dunn
Pam Durban

Cornelius Eady
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John Engels
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