Corners loom out until caught in the middle a slight utterance of protest is issued. The feeling of deficiency distresses the ego sensation and thoughts lie dead-center juxtaposed.
I first met Johnny Farr at Chapman's gym in North Philly. He came there in the evenings to work out with the speed and light bags and to try to put the touch on one of the boys. He had scar tissue where his right eyebrow should've been, slits for eyes, and a mashed-in nose. My yes, he was amusing to look at. He and Chappie knew each other from the old days in New York when he was signed on with the stable of Joe Benny after having fought in California. The word on him from Chappie was that he could've had the lightweight crown on a string if he hadn't associated with all the wrong people. He was living at a transient hotel over on Sixteenth Street.

One night I took Farr with me to a tavern that my uncle owned. We had a perfectly marvelous time. I set him up with shots of absinthe, and he told me stories about his splendid generosity in the days before the boxing commission took away his license for throwing a fight. Often, he'd tipped ten times the amount of the tab in a bar or restaurant, and on occasion, he'd given away his fashionable set of clothing and had gone
home in his underwear, and once, he’d given away his entire purse from a fight to the other passengers in a railroad car. Oh, he’d been a most openhanded fellow. When we were ready to leave, he got into a rather heated dispute with a baldheaded gentleman, something about the gentleman taking his coat from the rack by mistake. He followed him outside protesting quite vigorously, but the gentleman wouldn’t hear of it. Then Farr hit him with the right and hit him two times as he was going down. I had heard that Farr was very high-spirited when under the influence. He started to unbutton the coat, and I grabbed him and moved him from there post haste. The gentleman was insensible, but the blood coming from his nose was the right color. Assault and battery was quite enough for one night, no need for larceny. In the car, I explained to Farr that he was not even wearing a coat when we had come in. He was properly contrite. Yes indeed, it was all perfectly marvelous. The best of friends we were after that.

I didn’t mind the physical outbursts on his part. Heavens no. For me, it was all good fun. But sometimes he did get above himself. There was the time he said maybe, just maybe, he would be willing to manage me if the percentage was worth his while. In his considered opinion, I had the makings of a champion but needed the guiding hand of a shrewd operator like himself who knew all the angles of the fight game. I told him I didn’t want to pursue a boxing career. This was a great disappointment to him. He’d been absolutely serious about the whole business. The most disturbing was his suggestion that I follow him around, when he so desired, carrying a wineskin for him to drink from. It seems he’d often walked the streets of New York years ago with an attendant of this sort. It was extraordinary how the fellow’s mind worked, quite extraordinary.

The funny thing, I thought, was how he’d break down and cry like a baby each time he read that old, yellow clipping from the New York Post. We’d all be in the locker room of the gym, and somebody would say, “Let’s hear it one more time, Johnny.” And without fail he’d produce that clipping. There was one line which read: Farr has the brain of a child and the heart of a god that always started him off. I don’t know why. It was really quite funny. Sometimes Chappie would smack him on the back and give him the stock pep talk. That always quieted him down.

I never knew about Farr. Apparently, he had a thing about policemen and cab drivers. He thought it good sport to make life difficult for them. I never could make the connection. From time to time, he would announce to all bar patrons within earshot that he was the only man in the country who had every pulled a shiv on a cop and gotten off with a ten dollar fine. He was quite proud of this. I didn’t have the statistics on such things, so I took him at his word.

One time he was bragging about the many more knockouts he’d scored against an assortment of tough street fighters. And I mentioned offhandedly that I believed it was true of some boxers that their need to prove themselves by fighting in the street increases as their ability in the ring decreases. He was terribly put off by this and threw the contents of his beer glass in my face. He countered that by throwing a left hand which glanced off the top of my head. I had to clout him once in the ear and twice for good measure to make him tranquil. I knew how to handle him all right. Of course, there was only the one way to handle him.

As it happened, that was the last I saw of Farr. A few days later, he was stabbed to death by person unknown. I was in Reading at the time visiting my parents. I read about it in the papers while I was returning on the train. A milkman had found him lying in an alleyway near the ball park with the hilt of a hunting knife sticking out between his shoulder blades. I was not at all surprised that he’d gotten it from behind. When I got back to Philly, I went over to the gym. Everyone there seemed to be bearing up quite nicely. Chappie was most philosophical about Farr’s fatal bit of luck. He said the poor goddamn bastard was better off dead. My sentiments exactly.
Sparrow Hawk

I had a friend once
Who used to listen to my problems
And sometimes even give advice.
We used to sit along the edge
Of a field back in the woods
And let the sun heal our wounds
When we got hurt.
On good days he’d go
Tearing out over the field like he was flying
And sometimes I’d go with him.
It was great fun.
But things are different now.
I listen to my own problems
And give my own advice
And only sometimes get the chance
To feel the sun.
One day my friend was flying high
And only his feathers came back down.

Earl W. Lehman
Regulation Green

The concerned citizens of Baxter County Meet every Thursday evening From eight to eleven P.M. In George Harrington's basement To work out life's complications Over a standard size Regulation green Ping-pong bargaining table.
The rush of the wind brought tears to my eyes.
She picked up her hooves and we started to fly
Over the thickets and trees that grew,
O'er the meadows and fields we flew.

Higher and higher she started to rise;
I grasped her neck and closed my eyes.
Soon the clouds were passing beside us,
A flock of geese were ahead to guide us.

All day long we soared through the sky,
The rush of the wind, my horse and I.

Me and my horse one cold winter's day
Stopped by a creek and decided to stay.
The sun was melting the snow-topped pines
And shone down the creek with a brilliance so fine.

My horse grew impatient and wanted to run
I hopped on her back and we followed the sun
Faster and faster she started to run,
Faster and faster we followed the sun.

The sun's last flames in extinguishing rays,
Slowly were covered by the expanding haze.
For nights I have sung the aimless descent of the moon,
Its rays collecting into a circle of round stones
(which I'd like to call knowledge).
At night I have wondered if sounds sound solely
in the ear, if these muted, black peaks, these
streets crushed with old houses sing beyond
the irreverent flow of faces.

I have seen days caught
upon the wing of a bird,
the color of flight rising
to the clouds. Others
I have seen in crevices
conspicuous, labored with
stillness, I take no interest.

I am waiting for the silence
in a singular rain, the sky's
ancient opening, it's gray
muttering. I am waiting for
one drop of water that you
can follow into the ground.

**Souls**

The old burial grounds
lie quiet,
waiting for the soil
to be turned again,
bringing another
to join
the undisturbed souls
of great warriors of long ago.
But the spade no longer
buries souls here.
It is long abandoned
and long forgotten by all
but the very ancient,
the very wise.
And no one knows the ways of
the forest,
which paths to follow,
which footsteps to trace
to find it.

EXCURSIONS

The initiations are
ambiguous
conservative masses,
show me comfort, let me
feel pleasure without
pain.

The way of fascism
the unconscious prodding,
like a giant in a child's
room, knocking down
what can't be realized.
The sensitivity of religion.
Mystical yet practical
practical yet mysterious.
Shrouded ideology.
Grounded Star

I longed to swim among the springs of a black and boiling cave; but they were much too small.
I reached to catch a green fluorescent jellyfish flying by: but it was years away.
I tried to retrieve falling stars before they sparkled briefly, then fizzled to their deaths; extinguished by the night.
A hand reached for mine in a shock of warmth I had almost forgotten; but it vanished with the stars in the cold night air.
Blood

The real essence is out there crouched
Beneath some branch or clump of grass,
A mouthful of something warm and nourishing,
Something to fill the belly;
It's out there growing in the fields:
Grass, berries, roots...
A little blood for the imagination,
A little protein for the soul,
A little reality for the drifting mind.
In the spring of 1968 he was a patient in the mental health center of a hospital in Hagerstown and was quite sure he had fallen in love. In the mornings he shaved with the electric razor and dressed and combed his hair very carefully before Chloey was due on duty because he wanted to, at all times, look most presentable to her. Then he would sit on the one chair in the corner of the room and wait impatiently, listening for the sound of rubber soles on the waxed floor of the hallway. She always came in looking fresh and lovely and always brought him the sports section of the Baltimore Sun in addition to his maintenance dosage. He greatly enjoyed lying on the bed and reading through the baseball summaries. He was a devoted fan of the Orioles, and they had gotten out of the gate fast that spring and were leading the league. Chloey had to stay until she saw him swallow the two capsules. But whenever he put off taking the medication, pleased as always to be alone with her, and talked to her about the center, and how utterly wrong it was for him to be there and how he would get out just by being himself and how he was ahead of the doctors now and how it would only take a little time for them to catch up and realize all that was needed to be realized about him before he could be discharged, she did not mind but nodded her head agreeably and expressed her sympathy and her absolute confidence in him.

Looking at her, he felt he would die before he could ever think of another woman. She was very lovely with a softly modeled face and short gold hair, and her eyes and smile glowed.

Every time they gave him an Electro Convulsive Treatment Chloey assisted in padding him securely. And it was comforting for him to keep his eyes fixed on her face and hold on to the thought of her until the current was applied and he lost consciousness. On waking two hours later, he always had a headache, and sometimes Chloey massaged the back of his neck. Her hands were cool and as smooth as ivory.

The center was on the second floor, and his room overlooked the big courtyard of the hospital. In the afternoons, when the weather was good, the patients who were able could go down and out into the courtyard under supervision. There was a circular rose arbor and wooden tables and benches in the courtyard, and other patients with physiological troubles. Once in a while, he and Chloey sat on a bench against the wall in the sun and fed the pigeons that came from the roof.

Sometimes Chloey played blackjack or two-handed hearts with him in the lounge area. He had made it a point to find out at what times she went there. And sometimes he opened the door to his room and watched for her to pass along the hall. He liked the way her hair lifted off her forehead as she walked.

Always there were the other people, but all he wanted was to see her. The rest of the time he was glad to pass alone. There were just a small number of patients in the center, and he kept away from every one of them.
whenever possible. A middle-aged man who had been confined a long time and who had akathisia, an odd kind of restlessness caused by many high doses of tranquilizing drug, was a particular bother to him. The man was a hebephrenic and occasionally cornered him in the hall and rambled on illogically. The man had beady, staring eyes and a sharp, hooked nose and looked like a hunting-hawk, but all the patients there were non-violent. Some days, late in the mornings, he met with his doctor, and he thought the therapy sessions were a complete waste of time.

The spring went along this way for him. It was most anxious for him nights and weekends not knowing where Chloey was. But he did have a plan. After he was discharged he would find employment and come back for her. He only wanted to find employment and to marry her.

Then one morning a heavyset woman wearing glasses came into his room with the medication. She had been on night duty before. It was then that he learned Chloey had quit her job to marry a resident who was in neurology.

After the woman left, he stood at the window looking out, and he would not budge. Outside, it was raining, and there were puddles of water down in the courtyard and rose petals on the pavement. Finally, his doctor came to ascertain what the problem was. And

he told the doctor, as he looked out the window, that Chloey was a lousy, rotten bitch for winning his love and then leaving him for another man. The doctor spoke quite calmly, telling him that, on the contrary, Chloey was a very decent girl, and explaining at length to him why his emotional attachment to her was, of course, solely determined by his mental illness. And so when he was well again, he would realize he had not loved her.

But he was not well that spring nor that summer. And in the fall, the Orioles finished a distant second, and he fractured the skull of an orderly with a water pitcher and was transferred to the state hospital.
You find stars every night,  
sunset every twilight  
and rainbows almost everyday.  
You even rejoice in my gingerbread house  
from the rooftop of Peter Max castle.  
You catch a ride on the playful tides  
(and avoid the killers)  
as you glory in your “starry nights,”  
and mock the men so full of lust,  
and scorn them with your “prize-bull-fighter” lines.  
(Laugh them off along with the hallowed dust.)  
Your glass reflects the jeans so patched the denim’s lost  
and antique blouse, the buttons falling off.  
Refuge—  
Laughing spring delights in image:  
Flower with her waist-length golden hair;  
modest modern-day mona lisa enigma.  
Light the trip fantastic;  
the admission price as free as your many gifts.  
Full Moon will practically explode your mind  
once you’ve let it open.  
(Or so you’ve told me many times.)  
But don’t be frightened—  
You dig Andrew Wyeth too.  
Notice:  
Did he ever paint purple haze,  
or even orange sunshine,  
through windowpane?

Cynthia Williams
From the “Symphony of Spring” by Yiannis Ritsos

X

Love, love you hadn’t given me even a single shred of light for supper.

Unfed, naked and tearless I was wondering on the mountains fixing my unyielding eyes on the skies, searching my reward from the silence and the song.

The tender twilights, the mild curves of the mountains and the bright nights of summer were asking me, where you were, oh Love!

But I had nothing for an answer, retreating silent, lowering my face to hide my humiliation.

The pale daybreaks leaning their transparent chin on the window sill, nailing their immense blue eyes on my ample forehead were bitterly looking at me asking for an apology. What could I answer, Love? And I was passing the threshold, letting free my dark hair, and I was singing widely in the winds the song of the “unbound”.

Stubborn, pale and selfish I was looking into the world and I was crying: “I have nothing-everything is mine”.

But a child’s voice persistently was crying deep inside me, for you had not yet come, Love!

The nights of spring when the pollen of the stars and flowers was laying awake on my skin, a sad reflection was creeping in my immense soul because you were late, Love.

Looking for God I was looking for you. I was born just in time to greet at the end of the road the sun of your eyes.

Yiannis Ritsos

translated from the original Greek manuscripts by Maria Anastasiades
From the "Symphony of Spring"

XVIII

I close my eyes
under the peaceful night
and I hear the song
of myriads of stars
where your white fingers
touched my flesh.

I am the starry night of summer.

So deep and beautiful
so immense I emerged
from your love
that you can no longer hold me
in your arms.

My beloved.
Come and share with me
the gifts that you brought me.

XX
All my beauty gathers around your hair
and all that was secret and tender and was mine
and yet strange and had forgotten me,
comes back again in your hands
to be warm, to live again and to kiss you.

XXVI

Night is coming.
A silent lightening
wrinkles down the horizon.
Everywhere, scarves of farewell.

Where did we waste the sun?

XXVII

Day is breaking
innocent and confident,
like the creatures
in the first day of creation
that had not yet asked or wondered.

Yiannis Ritsos
translated from the original Greek manuscripts by Maria Anastasiades
Monarch Metamorphosis

The chrysalis hung almost hidden among soft lime green: a damp machine struggling with a glass-faced bag.

The pleated wings unfold; thin legs desperately shift their hold on skin and stem.

The abdomen elongates, excretes, she unfolds herself twice, rests, then awing opening lauches her.

Sherry L. Snow

Mother Nature’s Loss of Virginity

She is self-sown, (impatient mother image of earth) squirming immortality, hidden in Achernar’s* mountainous cleavage; enticing the god of Lalande* by maneuvering her whore-painted mouth along the edge of a limpid glowworm.

He rethrust with a brass-splitting twitch; she writhing earthward, her fullfrown womb distractedly placed the moth-eaten earth in havoc. She clutched her bowels and amid magnetic aura, hyped herself for mortifying the cosmos, and releasing relief she fell.

*Achernar- one of the brightest stars
*Lalande-star near to earth
IN THE DESERT

By David Schiller

The final days of the Mexican July, even in the northern regions, were fiercely hot. The thinned elevated air provided no resistance to the heat waves pouring out of the sky. The city of Saltillo, like all the others in the area, breathed with the rhythm of the sun. The morning hours were treasured for their comfort; streets choked on the numerous bicycles and motorcycles, old American cars and smoking pick-up trucks from the nearby villages. The sidewalks were dense with Mexicans, peddling, buying. Occasionally one would spot a cluster of fair-headed tourists snatching up the reported bargains, bickering in broken Spanish with a merchant in his overflowing stall. The marketplace was lined with the crafty dealers waiting for the touristas and their dollars, waiting for that gleam in the foreigner’s blue eyes. Barter served merely as a device to charge an outrageous price, have it knocked down through ‘compromise’ and still receive a sum three or four times the article’s worth. But it even satisfied the foreigners, especially the green Americans. Though aware of being cheated, they felt they had participated in some quaint cultural exchange and couldn’t wait to relate the story back home.

Towards midday the chatter in the markets and shops quieted down. Even the tourists sensed the oncoming heat and left for their air-conditioned motel rooms. The others of the street, the semi-prosperous Mexicans, slowly disappeared to a favorite nook for spending a motionless afternoon. By twelve-thirty the last diehard pepita vendor packed up his cones and left for a cooler café. By one o’clock only a solitary beggar sat on the sidewalk seemingly hypnotized by the elusive wavy patterns rising from the street. A bony dog approached the ragged man, rubbed his panting muzzle against the man’s cheek and broke his trance. The two of them hobbled off to the park. The town broiled until its daily four o’clock shower.

Bernard Levy knew the Mexican treatment of a shopping day too well. He and his wife Meryll travelled through Mexico every summer, purchasing goods for a small import shop they owned on 8th Street, New York. They would start in Mexico City, relax for several days and then begin by buying leather on the Calle Pino Suarez. Filling their needs, they would ship it home and ride south to Cuernavaca. In the pastel city they bought assorted huaraches and straw hats. Southwest a short distance to Taxco and a search amongst the cobblestone streets for .925 hallmark silverwork. Then west to Guadalajara for fine handblown glass. Ship it, and a very long bus ride northeast to their last stop Saltillo.

By the time they arrived Levy brimmed with impatience. The heat was exceptional this year, unbearable sunlight concentrated in the town after bouncing off the mountains that surrounded it. It would take him a good week of successive mornings to complete his inventory. The first day he left the roaming-house as early as possible, leaving Meryll to sleep, and stalked the deserted streets in front of the unopened shops. He bought serapes in Saltillo, colorful, handwoven, perfect fora damp night in New York. But in high summer with temperatures in the upper nineties Levy began to sweat just thinking about handling the heavy Mexican blankets. He went into the only open restaurant, ordered coffee, and waited for the merchants. He looked over the vast, dim market. His fingers tapped incessantly. Sitting idly disgusted him; he tossed a fifty centavo piece on the metal coca-cola table and left.
Where money was concerned Levy prided himself in being practical. He disliked dealing with the Mexicans: they acted too nonchalantly for businessmen. Levy took advantage of their trade system, shrinking the prices, screaming lower and lower amounts in a bearlike voice, pounding his fist. They gave in more often than not. Levy’s physique, his enormous muscular body, his heavy-boned face with his threatening beard was the crucial factor. They held back until they saw him groan with anger at their stubbornness; then Levy got his price. Out of his pocket came a handful of worn pesos. He meticulously counted out six hundred, two thousand, whatever the agreed sum, paused, squeezed the wad. The merchant stared, eyes all aglow. Then Levy stripped off fifty or a hundred and handed the seller the rest. They rarely complained. Sometimes a tinge of guilt plagued him as he gathered his goods, but he rarely succumbed to it. He always moved on to the next peddler.

Levy walked from the restaurant to the park. He was tired, tired of the journey, tired of haggling with the Mexicans. He sat down on a bench. He felt caught in limbo, trapped between anxiety and fatigue. He glanced around—he discovered he had a companion; looking up he saw the cole, marble eyes of General Zaragoza. Levy stared at the statue at once fascinated and uncomfortable. He slowly realized he was gazing into a mirror. He felt old and lifeless; it would be a simple task for someone to plant him in a forgotten park. It was a horrible, lonely thought, and Levy tried to cheer himself up by remembering like a daydream the two joys in his life: Meryll and his business. But Meryll, though still his wife, was a separate person—his problem drove deeper and more personal. And his business: He wouldn’t shed tears over making huge profits off the faceless people who bought his merchandise just as he wouldn’t repent his style of importing though sometimes he thought himself a bit too brusque. Yet business was only an empty exercise. There had to be something more than that, he defiantly thought to himself, something beneath the bead besides a ruthless comprador. There was once a sensitive side of Levy. In fact his impetus for starting an import shop was the Mexican beauty in crafts he used to admire. But, as Levy became more and more involved in figures and accounting books, he had to shuffle his sensitive inclinations to Meryll. She could relinquish time for the more fragile qualities of life. Levy: he made the money which only led to years of being numbed by the grey walls of New York, anaesthetized by the pressures of his cold world. It was only now that he understood how cruelly one-sided he planned his life, how sickly devoid he was of any private pleasure. He rubbed his eyes; they were stiff and petrified. He looked to the General again, shook his fist and resolutely vowed never to allow his eyes to atrophy and become that ghastly marble. He would start immediately. He surveyed the mountains, barely tan and visible behind the palms and towering hibiscus grown in the park, and stormed his mind for a plan. The serapes could wait, another day in the crummy market wouldn’t ruin their salability. He lit a cigarette and walked briskly back to the rooming-house to fetch Meryll.

Meryll doubled her normal walking pace to keep up with Levy lumbering like an excited bear ahead of her. She felt like she was still asleep; she was too dazed to comprehend the odd morning. Levy had shaken her awake, had ordered her to dress quickly, and off they had rushed into the city. Now she followed in the vacuum he created by pushing away anyone in his path. She knew it wasn’t a great buy that roused him: Levy made his own bargains. And he never attacked the day with that crazy smile. They passed the market, confirming her thoughts, walked a few blocks and entered the park. He stopped before a large monument of a soldier on his horse.
"Mer, meet General Zaragoza, my saviour. Pay attention to the bloodless eyes." Levy then stood bowed and eerily silent. Meryl, by this tile totally confused, stared at the General hoping to solve the enigma. But there was no answer for this madness. Perplexed she just opened her mouth to ask Levy why—but too late. He had already turned and started walking out of the park.

She followed of course, more out of curiosity than blind devotion. She could have stopped, shouted "Bernie. Explain." But that would have been futile. And so off they marched rank and file past the center of town on the Avenida Ramos-Azripe. They cut off on a smaller quieter street full of bakeries which then blended into a colonial residential section. Levy stopped, bent over and pried loose a sidewalk tile older than Maximillian. He handed it to Meryl. It weighed about fifteen pounds though it was only eight inches square. The smooth tile showed a deeply etched design on a faded yellow and red background. The intricate patterns of each tile fitted exactly with the one adjacent to it. All of the older sidewalks of Saltillo resembled huge mosaics. Meryl replaced it, making the sidewalk whole again.

The houses became seedier as they travelled further away from the town's
heart. They no longer had the traditional central patios with ripened fat people preparing chicken and goat for the afternoon meal. The wrought iron window guards and large carved doors vanished blocks away. In the center of the homely street, about twenty children played soccer. One screamed “coche, coche” and they all raced for the curb. The driver stopped his car, got out and began kicking the ball. A fierce match ensued, the children delighted, giggling, running helter skelter. Meryll nudged Levy to play for the children, but he mumbled something about a bad knee. After a moment he broke out laughing. Meryll laughed, “OK athlete.” and they kept walking. She felt completey happy when she heard that laugh; Levy seemed to have lost ten cheerless years. It no longer mattered where he led her.

Soon the streets lost even their paving and the sidewalks disappeared completely. They had reached the very end of town. The clay streets and the dross adobe houses were like debris on the seashore deposited by the sparkling ocean. Garbage lay in the ruts. Ancient suspicious mothers sat outside their gloomy houses. Twelve cathedral bells rang in the distance, a distance emphasized by the grim disparity between the two faces of the city. A few dirty children tagged behind the pair. They held strings with giant flies tied to the end. The flies were green and shiny, the size of a baby mouse, and buzzed constantly. They reminded Meryll of a ride on Coney Island where the people sat in little cages and were spun around gleefully screaming. And always the operators looked so bored with the levers in their hands. Meryll kept peering over her shoulder trying to smile at the children. They just followed like a silent parade, never changing the blank looks on their faces. She tugged on Levy’s sleeve, and they stopped. and they stopped. They confronted the children, greeted them in Spanish. They remained silent. One tiny boy grinned at the bear and his small white woman. He then pissed on the packed clay ground. The puddle lay there steaming. Meryll looked up at Levy, her hazel eyes questioning him. He motioned to leave, and as they passed the last house, a squalid mud hut, Meryll began to cry. Levy had to change the subject.

“Save your salt, Mer. We’ll be crossing the desert.” He tried to be funny.

A feral look of terror stretched across Meryll’s thin face. The boisterous Levy assured her the desert was small, a mile long, two at the most, and at the base of the mountain, he pointed directly ahead, flowed a beautiful stream.

“A stream. How the hell do you know there’s a stream there: And how do you
know how long the desert is: Don’t you realize how hot it is: We could easily die in this wretched place.”

“I know how hot it is. And I bought a map in town. A mile long, two at the most. Believe me. Here look.” Levy showed her the map. He then recounted his satori in the park and told her his plan.

“We’ll bathe in the stream. But first we must cross the desert and sweat out all the crap and waste, all the garbage we’ve been surrounded by. Then we’ll wait for dusk and then return to the city new people.”

Meryll turned and looked towards Saltillo. It floated on the heat far away as in a dream. They had already walked hundreds of yards beyond the houses. Traipse through the desert, bathe in a sacred stream. The whole idea sounded dense and arcane, so unlike the realistic Levy she knew. But then her wasted years returned like ghosts, phantom cycles. All the childless years, the boring hours she had spent in the store trying to smile at the non-descript customers, and Levy growing sour and grumpy. Now they discarded time and happiness. Levy was mad, deliciously mad and his idea stood as an alluring testimony. She turned beaming with carefree joy.

They walked. The brown hump of a mountain lay straight ahead; the sun shone directly above. They made the corner of a
majestic triangle, pressing forward, brushing ankles with the shrubs and cactii, overcovered their shoes with dust. Lizards scuttled and played under the rocks, sometimes darting out and escaping the foot-falls like acrobats. The desert felt so entirely wide open. Levy flapped his arms relishing the feeling and swallowed huge draughts of air, reeling under their effect. The sun blazed hotter than either of them had ever experienced, but they welcomed it. They allowed the heat to bore its way into their very marrow. They let the evil sweat ooze from their pores like a miasmatic liqueur. They knew from the start that talk was prohibited. They were pilgrims, and a pilgrimage is a solemn affair.

They continued that way for about a half hour, exuberant, each of them lost in their own private thoughts. They reminisced their lives: Levy thought the bleakest, most despairing thoughts possible, so they would be gone forever; Meryll mused over the pleasantries of their marriage, of her childhood to preserve them, so they wouldn’t evaporate under the sun’s scrubbing presence. She kept her eyes to the ground, not focused on anything, and noticed she became dizzy seeing the plants whirling by. She stopped and gazed upward. He was horrified. The mountain hadn’t changed position; it remained the same hulk, not larger as it should have appeared.

“Bernie! It hasn’t moved!” Her voice cracked.

“Sure it has. Don’t worry, we’re almost there.” Levy wondered why he lied. The desert deceived them. It would have been an hour’s walk or a full day’s hike. They fell fool to a common mirage.

Levy held her arm as they advanced. The mountain continued to recede like some sort of bait luring them onward. The desert felt hollow rather than open, empty instead of free. Chills began to knit at Meryll’s body. She was weakening. Vertigo jellied her legs, and she tripped over a rock, fell, and cut her forehead. Levy wiped off the dusty blood and slung her across his shoulder. He blindly trudged for the mountain. Meryll opened one painful eye, watched the brown floor bounce up and down, the shrubs and cactii quickly reaching out to grab her and then retreating, reaching and retreating, nauseating her. She closed the eye and passed out. Levy felt Meryll suddenly go limp, and he panicked. He started trotting towards the mountain, clear water gurgling in his ears. It was his only hope, he thought. The stream, the magical stream flowing so peacefully at the base of the mountain. The stream made him feel cool. Meryll became light, and he ran to the mountain like a lunatic. The coolness turned to chills, the sweating stopped. Distal rays of the sun danced on his skull. A flaming red color curtained his vision. He collapsed, breathing like thunder on the desert floor. He rolled Meryll off his back and crawled a foot or two. He tried to see one last time: before him the mountain was spinning, caught in a waterless eddy. He passed out. A lizard squirmed from under Levy’s arm leaving behind his broken, mottled tail. He scurried under a rock...

Levy felt something cold strike his neck. He couldn’t remember how long he lay unconscious, but the air had turned dark and tense. He looked up: the sun was a glare behind a grey, cloudy sky. A drop of rain landed plop directly in his eye. A flash, a roar, and they fell thick and fast. Meryll arose. She shivered and then noticed, she was wet. She lifted her head, letting the rain soak her face. She ran over to Levy and put her arms around his drenched body. She looked at him, tears in her ecstatic eyes, and whispered “We’re alive.”

“Yeah. The rain. Come on, let’s get out of here.” His voice was sullen and laced with failure.

“But the rain.” Meryll said laughing, kissing the precious drops as they fell.

Levy didn’t hear her. He had already started walking, thinking about the serape merchants he’d see in the morning. The bastards had better sell.
CRUCIFICTION

some comic book jesus
spiked and straddled on a telephone pole
dripped clotted purple blood from his ankles and hands
onto our garbage can lid
two little girls playing hopscotch
in his shadow
laughed happily for the people that hurried by.

March

Blustering March clears the air
Of winter's residue
And over the fields of wintering grass
Clouds pass like puffs of smoke
And stroke the sleeping earth
With gentle fingers.

Earl W. Lehman
Cats creep black walking wind
Midnight shine of city vibrates,
Windows bounce the image back
of the constant conflict
The angry flashing lights seek no solace.

Sidewalks offer very little plant life
And boys lust sadistically for trees,
Nature tries and dies, gently
Giving up on madness.
Summer Shower

The godless rain loves the lowlands
Life beckons to its call,
Falls down
Soaks ground,
Muffling the sound of loneliness;
It shifts the grime on factory walls.
Leaving the air with a sigh
It drops apathetically.

Robert Furman

From the "Symphony of Spring"

XII

Making useless flowers
I forgot how to live.
Behind the bars of my books
I imprisoned the rosy faces of my days.
The yellow light of my lamp
was crying in my room,
while the voices of the fields and the birds
were flooding the immense night of July.

Yiannis Ritsos

Sea Drift

I wander open-eyed in the flux
A drifting, sifting creature,
Filtering, feeling, forming opinions,
Capable of changing direction midstream,
Conjuring ideas, idioms, appetites,
Wandering, wondering, wishing.

Earl W. Lehman
acknowledgements

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