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Front and Back Covers by Patricia Burgmeier
My Table, The Sea

a book bobs on my
wood grain table,
a treasure chest
on the ocean’s tide
it looks to the ashtray
island, a cigarette
sailor, stripe-necked
and red haired
asleep marooned on
the dusty beach, sending
a smokey SOS
to the world

Tim Metallo

Ominous Warning
To A Stranger

Friend,
pianos are vibrating,
crawling so slightly
out of parlors
and practice rooms,
incognito, unseen
they imitate everything.
Pretending pianos are
seizing great inches
inconspicuously.
Can’t you hear them just now
espousing old themes,
patience is the key.
Slowly, friend, slowly
they are becoming.

John Burdick

I Got A Call The Baby Is Born

I think you’re not sure
why you had journeyed here:
Novel air—not warm, not wet,
not letting you float
like a sleeping diver in a
small, rich ocean cave.
A crying breath rang in
small, pink ears that once heard only
a mother’s muffled inner call
to be new, though I know you’re
old and growing and knowing
everything but how to live
here in a loud piercing place
where faces will peer and grin at you.
Who changed you from fish
to family?
Who helped to fire your soft clay bones
to hardness inside your mother’s
life kiln?
Who started your heart pulsing, filled
with your parents’ passionate
thoughts, and other conceptions
of love?
Who shoved and saved you from
a watery world, to this
novel air?
Perhaps it was you
who saved yourself—maybe you
actually knew what would
happen, and suddenly drowning,
you surfaced so that you
could become a giant:
the potential saved along with you.
And I realize this even though
I’ve yet to see your old-man’s face,
or your wandering fingers,
or the entire life that’s
already in your ancient eyes.

Tim Metallo
Cleaning Up From Autumn

When the snow in the back woods
Is gone, then they'll say
Spring is here,
With the torn birch leaves,
Brown pasted along fences,
And the ink-streamed page from a
Pennysaver, resting wet beneath a drain
Pipe and the living room sill.
They'll be out before dusk, and after,
With straw brooms and rakes
Cleaning up from autumn. They'll talk
About last summer,
And the children,
And of planting marigolds in the
Front garden. The children will be
Out there, listening, watching, taller,
Playing chalk games on the tar
Road. And the grandparents will watch from
The porch, answering questions, thinking,
Talking to the gardeners. He'll
tell them how to trim the pine
He planted when he was a boy. She'll
Say they're doing fine, and to mind
The children instead.
Streetlights will finally kick on
Past eight, but wait,
For the twilight will linger,
Holding back the stars and a crescent moon,
Knowing it shouldn't rush the cleaners.

Tom Prestopnik
Mildred Castel

I

Light streamed through the windows on the west side of the house into the room where Mildred Castel sat speaking to the young Reverend Clemens. The door at the end of the room stood open, allowing the warm, spring air to flow gently over the thick white carpet and elegant furnishings which announced the room in an unmistakable pale green motif. Rev. Clemens sat on the sofa, legs crossed at his ankles, as the sun, reduced in intensity by the sheer white curtains across the windows, fell softly upon his face. Old Mildred Castel sat in the chair facing the Reverend with her back to the windows, such that the upper-half of her body formed a gray silhouette against the incoming light, and at the same time made her look like the woman on the cameo brooch pinned to the bosom of her dress.

"Young people don't know what love is anymore," Mildred said. She didn't shout it. But she said it with a force and a meanness that demanded recognition.

She had been confiding in Rev. Clemens about her niece, Sarah, who was dating a young colored man. "I just think that coloreds should stay with coloreds and whites should stay with whites," she said. "William says I shouldn't call them colored anymore, that I should call them Negroes... that's the thing nowadays he says."

The Reverend had listened quietly to this, just as he was then listening to her talk about love. "I have some good friends who are colored," she had told him. And even then, the Reverend hadn't interrupted to tell her that he knew these friends weren't really colored, but only white with large lips and noses, because he knew that that was the same to her, that it didn't make any difference.

"No, I suppose you're right," he responded. "Young people don't know what love is." The words spilled easily from his mouth. After all, he thought, with half the people dissolving their marriages and the other half living in sin, it was easy to say. But deep inside he thought and felt something else that maybe he didn't even know he felt: that she doesn't know what love is either, he that has been twice married and reared 8 children, nor do I, that have never married and probably never will, because both of us, neither of us, has the power to know such a thing. We live in spite of ourselves; we look at life as we would look into a pool of still water: each time we reach out and try to touch it or grab a piece of it, it only cracks or swims away, leaving us with an aberration of what we thought we knew.

He did not say this though. He only remembered almost having thought he had said it. Mildred Castel smiled at him, not because she knew what he was thinking, but because she knew something she hadn't yet even told herself. And the Reverend returned her smile, not because he knew what she hadn't yet told herself, but because he knew there was One who did know, even before it happened, and would know long after it had been forgotten.

II

Charlie Pike and Mildred Anderson laid flat on their stomachs, peering around the corner of the barn into the darkness where Clara Johnson and Wilson Voy stood smooching and hugging each other. Mildred giggled, and Charlie told her to "hush," and she hushed, because Charlie was 12 and 12 was older than 10, and she knew that that gave him the right. Charlie pulled Mildred back behind the barn: "Do you want them to hear us?" he whispered. "No, I'm sorry," responded Mildred. "All right then, just keep quiet... and keep your head out of my way," he told her. So they leaned back around the corner of the barn and watched again, but Mildred didn't know how it could be any fun if they weren't allowed to laugh. Charlie was much too serious about the whole affair, she thought. Once, when Wilson Voy slipped his hand beneath Miss Clara's blouse, Charlie tugged Mildred back behind the corner of the barn, and made her sit there while he alone watched. But Miss Clara had gotten angry, so Mildred didn't have to sit without watching for long, and then everything was all right again.

Clara Johnson worked for Mildred's mother, Ida Anderson. She helped cook and clean for Mr. Anderson and all the hired men who worked on the farm. Wilson Voy was one of the hired men. Mr. Anderson had given Wilson a job when he returned home from World War I. Mrs. Anderson hadn't liked Wilson, but her husband had told her: "Now ma, you know I can't turn down a boy in uniform. And besides, he'll work plenty hard enough; I'll see to that."

So every evening after the big meal, Wilson and Clara would sneak off into the summer night, and when they could both escape from their houses, Mildred and Charlie would slide out of bed and into the night to watch the couple carry-on.

About the 4th or 5th time Mildred and Charlie spied on the two love birds, Wilson heard Mildred snickering, and then saw both children hiding in the bushes. He didn't let them know he had seen them. He just whispered in Miss Clara's ear and then walked her back to the house. Next day, Wilson con-
fronted Mildred and Charlie playing in the yard. "Sometimes youngsters see and hear things they ain't supposed to," he said. All the time he kept his hands hidden behind his back, and the two children were scared, not so much because they feared the leather strap they believed he held in his hands, but because they thought he would tell their parents they had been sneaking out nights, and then it wouldn't hurt for just a day, but the fun would end, and that would hurt for a long time. "Yes sir," they said. "And you don't want to be doing what you hadn't ought to, now do you?" "No sir," they said. "Do you kids think you can remember to forget whatever you've seen 'til now and forget to remember even what you might see? Wilson asked. And again the two answered, "yes sir," only this time they weren't quite certain what they had agreed to. Then Wilson said "good," and removing his hands from behind his back, he revealed a hand-mirror (with a picture of a beautiful and demure lady on the back) and a small bow-and-arrow. He gave the presents to the children and then just walked away.

Though puzzled, the children were delighted. After that, Mildred and Charlie didn't sneak out nights anymore. During the day, Mildred sat hidden at the edge of the woods near the house, admiring herself in her hand-mirror. And Charlie traveled over the hillside, shooting at birds and rabbits and snakes with his bow-and-arrow. Without knowing it, Wilson Voy had chosen the perfect presents, presents which both allowed him the fruition of his own desires, and slowly, surreptitiously taught the children the very same desires.

III

Sitting on the edge of the bed with her daughter Helen, Mildred Castel told her what she thought a daughter ought to know the night before her wedding.

"You don't need to tell me about that mother. I know that already," said Helen.

"When I was your age, a girl didn't speak so freely about what she knew or didn't know," her mother said.

"I don't see what's wrong with it," said Helen.

"Wrong with it?" Mildred mocked her as though astonished. "It's not something you enjoy. It's something you do only because you have to, because it's your duty to your husband, to make him happy."

"Oh mother," said Helen, "you talk as though it was the next thing worse to death itself."

"And that it is," her mother responded flatly.

They spoke thereafter only of bridal gowns and satin and lace and wedding cake. And Helen never said what she thought to herself: that in that case, she and everyone she knew was nothing more than living sin, not even living perhabs, just flesh, withered and drawing closer to eternal retribution.

IV

No one had ever called Mildred Anderson a beautiful girl, not even her mother, but she had a tremendous figure, and if you could just keep your eyes on that, then after a while her face really didn't seem so bad. At 19, she still prized her virginity. That was about the same time that she started working as a secretary at the government hospital in Hermansville. She lived right there in Hermansville too. She roomed during the week in the home of an elderly lady, and on weekends she made the 50 mile journey home to Maple Grove.

Mildred made friends with the other girls in the office easily enough, and her daddy had bought her a big old Ford coupe to run around in, so she was quite happy. Besides, she brought home $24 per week, which was no measy sum. And so she worked for a year or two maybe, and then one weekend she came home and there was shouting and a slamming of doors coming from the farmhouse, and then Mildred came out onto the porch with her brown leather suitcase, and after standing there for a moment to wipe the tears from her eyes, she looked at the house one last time, and then got in her car and drove away. That was still Friday night; she didn't wait for Sunday afternoon as usual, and she didn't come back that night either — nor did she come home for two whole years, or even write or call. She returned home one day like she had never left. This time she carried a baby boy.

"Look, mama," she said, "this is my boy William." And she was proud, like there was no reason she shouldn't be.

Her mother took the baby in her arms and smiled at him. Then she looked back at Mildred and frowned. "Your daddy won't be none too pleased to see you," she said.

"He'll just have to get used to me," Mildred said. "Besides, I'm not staying; I only came to show you William."

"It's not you that your daddy will mind... and what about the baby's father?"

Mildred just looked out the window. "I'm making $36 per week now," she said.
And later that day, when her father came in the house from doing chores, he
looked at Mildred and scowled. But she could tell that he was surprised, even
though he had tried so hard to look angry before looking stunned, as if he
wanted her to see him mad the way he felt because of her all along, and not just
mad when he was forced to look at her. But when he saw the baby, he softened
enough to tell her: "Stay for dinner if you like. It makes no difference to me."

V

John Castel woke early on Sunday morning. The sun was just peeking out
from behind the hills, and a milky fog hung close to the earth that was still wet
with rain from the night before. He couldn't yet tell if the sky was going to be
blue or gray, but it didn't much matter. He went into the bedroom and woke
his wife Mildred.

"Do you know what time it is?" she asked.

"About five o'clock I suppose," he said. "I'm going fishing this morning."

Mildred rolled over and groaned. "There are some muffins in the breadbox,
and your coffee thermos is in the cellar-way."

"That's all right," John said. "I'll get something at the diner." He paused.

"I'm going to take William with me."

Mildred sat up in bed. "You're going to what?"

"I said I'm taking William fishing with me this morning."

"He's too young, John."

"He's 12 years old for Christ's sake."

"I don't care. And besides, you can't just go waking him up at this hour."

"He'll love it once he's up. He was in bed early last night anyway."

"It's too cold out. I won't have my boy patrolling the banks of some river
before dawn. What if he fell in... you know he can't swim?"

Her husband didn't argue anymore. He just walked out of the room. His
wife listened until she heard his footsteps pass by William's room and then
take him out of the house alone. When she heard the pickup drive away, she
went back to sleep.

That's how it had always been. William was never allowed to do anything,
except maybe play the piano or read a book. It was always: William will get
sick, or hurt, or cold, or tortured by wild Indians... whatever Mildred Castel
needed to imagine to keep her son from doing anything with her husband. If
those excuses failed, she would finally say, "he's my son John; I know what's
best for him." Because to her it wasn't that she and her husband had a son, but
instead, like she had a husband and she had a son. The two were separate
possessions, and there was no way she was even going to let husband blood
combine with son blood to overpower her.

John Castel tried 7 times in as many years to produce a son of his own, but
all his efforts only yielded 7 lovely daughters. Mildred endured the constant
state of pregnancy, which wore her too soon beyond her actual years, without
complaining, but she never gave her husband a son. It was as if with each
pregnancy, she only increased her indominability as if she had known all
along that there was no son waiting inside her to be born: and this was the
strangest thing of all, because while there was no man inside, outside, the man
grew and grew, until at last, when she and her husband sat side-by-side, what
you saw was not a woman body talking to a man body, but just one body
drawing the life out of the other until you could scarcely determine anymore
which was the woman body and which was the man body.

William Castel grew up under his mother's apron strings, so to speak. And
the grandmother played no small part in his upbringing either. Together, the
two women looked after every detail. They worked harder than sin itself to
see to it that the boy was polished and proper as he could possibly be. Together, the
two women looked after every detail. They worked harder than sin itself to
see to it that the boy was polished and proper as he could possibly be. They
ever discussed though, what they were both doing so deliberately. It wasn't
as if they had said to themselves: "here's a boy, our boy, that we can make into
a President of the United States." It wasn't like that at all, because inside, they
both knew that if only they could pull it off, if they could only hide truth in a
lie, then everything would be all right. As William grew up, Mildred thought
to herself on more than one occasion: now he is fine. Now they will never
know. But then she would look at him again, and see that some of it was still
there, and so she would polish him even more, until he was so pure and white
you could practically see right through him, like a ghost. But then, when you
looked through him, you only saw his mother again, and that was no good
either. So she kept polishing.

VI

William Castel was a good looking man for 35. Maybe that was it. He didn't
look his age, like somehow he hadn't really lived that many years. Maybe too,
that's why he wasn't ready that day in the restaurant.

He was dining peacefully by himself, when he heard a boisterous old
woman coming in from the adjacent bar. Her name was Clara. His mother had
introduced her to him once very quickly when they had accidentally met in
the train station. He had felt at the time that his mother didn't like her. He
didn't like her now himself; she was quite drunk. He concentrated on his
food, but when she walked by, she stumbled and caught herself on his arm. "Oh, excuse me there lad," said Clara. "I didn't mean to lean into you like that." And she laughed and started to walk away, but when William looked up, she hesitated, looking quite sober and gay. "William? Is that you?"

"Yes, hello," said William.

"Call me Clara," she said. Then she sat down with him, brushing off her escort like dust. "Waiter!" she yelled across the room. "Bring me another bourbon and water and..." looking at William, "what'll you have?"

"Oh, nothing for me thanks."

And so then she just looked straight at him and sneered. "That's right. I forget. Your mother wouldn't have you drinking, would she?"

William tried to smile. "I don't suppose she would."

"She had it all mapped out for you didn't she?"

"I don't know what you mean."

Clara drew a long breath. "She wasn't always like that you know, not always so proper."

"Mother?" William laughed nervously. "I'd guessed she'd always been the same."

"Well you guessed wrong," Clara said. And after she'd had time to thoroughly loosen up, she told him the rest.

"I worked for your grandmother when your mother was just a little girl. She and that friend of hers... Charlie was his name, used to spy on me and Wilson — may the Lord rest his soul. He was a bum. We didn't know until we'd already done a considerable more than cuddling, and so when Wilson spotted them, we didn't know what they'd seen, and so Wilson bought them presents to keep them quiet. Your mother saw too much I reckon, cause 10 years later she came home carrying you, and there weren't no John Castel to speak of then neither."

William got red in the face. "I've no idea what you're talking about."

"It's ever so simple child. You're a bastard. That's all," said Clara.

"How come you never told me?"

"Told you what... what are you talking about?"

"About my father."

"What about him. You know he passed away a year ago as well as I do."

"Don't lie to me, mother."

"Is something wrong, William?"

"Only that I'm a bastard," he shouted. "Only that my whole life has been a goddamn lie all the time. But now I know..." And he was thinking to himself: so this is it: this is my punishment for being too good, for thinking I was good and being proud. He waited for his mother to deny what he had said so he could hate her more, but there was only silence on the phone, and then he hung up.

VII

The afternoon was growing late. Already the room was getting too dark to see even the wrinkles on Mildred Castel's face. She had been talking to the Reverend for a long time. Reverend Clemons stood up.

"How's William doing now?" He asked as though they had been talking about her son all along and not the church fund-raiser.

"The doctor says there's no reason he can't return to work soon," she said.

"Good, good," said the Reverend. "It's a poor thing to see a young man like your son stricken so. It makes us wonder why the Lord doesn't save such good people from pain."

Mildred smiled. "Thank you Reverend. I don't know why either. My late husband had a sister who was that way too."

"It's a mighty strange thing," said Reverend Clemens.

"Yes," said Mildred, and then handing him a piece of paper, "here's for the church."

When the Reverend looked at the check for $500 he thought: It is all right now. Now she has paid. She has not yet given her soul, but she will give that one day soon enough too. She and others like her — they are good people. They have wronged, but so have we all. It's all right as long as you pay the cost. That makes all the difference. And then, just as he turned away to leave, something came over him, and he said: "I can't take this. This is not nearly enough."

"I could give a little more," she said, astonished.

He handed her the money. "No. All you can do now is try to teach William what love is."

John Arthur
There'll Be No Telling

From the sheet rock ceiling
in his miserable, tropical apartment
erupts a hole
which drips buckets of cloudy brown
water. He sits in an old velvet chair
for long afternoons, his back bent
over, his lower lip
jutting lazily, looking at the
soggy, mildewed wall, wondering
when it will collapse. Sometimes
he remains motionless until night,
when the trembling rats flit across the floor, sniffing at
his pant cuffs from time to time.
Sensing no life in him, they
move without fear, but there is, after all,
something in his heart, and
one of these nights,
there'll be no telling,
the rats might know a horror.

J. F. Smith
The Case of the
THREE COMEDIANS
A Play for Radio
by Russell Fox

Virgil Rafferty, "After sixteen years on the force and a record any other cop would kill for, one mustachioed nun /who Rafferty mistook for a criminal and shot in a grocery store/ had done me in... I was ready for my next assignment, with a new base of operations and a new job description: VIRGIL RAFFERTY--PUBLIC LIBRARY." Rafferty's first assignment is to recover several overdue books from three individuals. The three, Ringer, Monk and Killigrew had taken out a large number of books on comedy, and in addition, Monk took out books on twentieth century philosophy, and Killigrew was interested in neurosurgery.

Rafferty's path leads him to Marko's Comedy Club, where he finds the three men and a mysterious lady in purple. Killigrew and the Purple Lady force Monk to write something on a piece of paper, and each takes a half of the piece. While on the trail of Killigrew and the Purple Lady, as they leave Marko's, Rafferty is hit by a bus. After a miraculous recovery, he goes to Monk's apartment to investigate and finds Monk and his pet goat decapitated. Then, he discovers a diary soaked in blood, but he's able to read "three cryptic sentences: 'Would that I had never been born. I have discovered the Cosmic Joke. May I have mercy on me.'" Rafferty is quickly suspected of the murder by the police. He then returns to Marko's Comedy Club, sees Killigrew, and follows him to his estate.

ACT TWO
Scene One
Traffic. A churchbell tolls six times.

MISS FIDDITCH: (Frantic) Virgil? Virgil, is that you? Oh, good lord!
RAFFERTY: (groans) Where- am I?
MISS FIDDITCH: Why, you're on the front steps of the library. I was just about to open the doors for the day when I found you here behind this piller. At first I thought you were a pile of clothes. I hardly knew it was you. What happened, Virgil?
RAFFERTY: I - ouch. Somebody wanted me crowned, apparently.
MISS FIDDITCH: Virgil, you're hurt! You've been hit in the head.
RAFFERTY: It's just a flesh wound, Miss Fidditch.
MISS FIDDITCH: Adelle.
RAFFERTY: Addie.
MISS FIDDITCH: Addie.
RAFFERTY: Addie
MISS FIDDITCH: Oh Virgil. (Becomes businesslike) Take my arm. That's good. We'll go inside, and I'll dress your wound while you tell me all about it. (Footsteps, doors, footsteps, etc.)

RAFFERTY: While Addie Fidditch patched my skull I told her about the unfortunate fate of Mister Monk, but I left out some of the more colorful details. I didn't let on about my adventures on the Killigrew estate, either, but that's what I was thinking about. I attempted to reconstruct the events, but I kept ending up with some freakish mammal with a lion's head and a bear's body. It was like a jigsaw puzzle with the pieces mixed up- And some of them missing. I was thinking specifically of Monk's missing head. When it came to heads and bodies, the trail of this case had a tendency to fork. Then I thought about Mister Killigrew's exotic taste in pets- and his appreciation of the literature of neurosurgery- and the whole puzzle started to shift around a bit. That was when Fidditch poured a good two shots of alcohol into my split scalp.

RAFFERTY: Ouch!
MISS FIDDITCH: I'm sorry, Virgil, but it has to hurt if it's going to kill all those germs. -You know, there's still one thing I don't understand about these people who cracked you over the head.
RAFFERTY: Yes, -Addie?
MISS FIDDITCH: Well, why wouldn't they just leave you in that alley? Why would they drop you off all the way down here? Who would bother?
RAFFERTY: I think we can deduce that the action you have mentioned might have been undertaken for one of several reasons.
MISS FIDDITCH: Like what?
RAFFERTY: Well- perhaps Killigrew's cohorts would have a good reason to remove an incriminating body of evidence from the vicinity of their operations.
MISS FIDDITCH: But why not dump your body in the river? Why bring it here?
RAFFERTY: That, Miss Fidditch, is still a mystery. But there is no such thing as an insoluble mystery. With your permission, I would like to spend the day following up on a few leads in this case.
MISS FIDDITCH: Virgil Rafferty, you put that thought right out of your mind. You have been knocked unconscious, run over by a bus, and accused of murder by the chief of police. Under absolutely no conditions will I allow you to go back out there and probably get yourself killed.
RAFFERTY: But, Addie--
MISS FIDDITCH: No buts about it. I'm your boss, and I- (her voice has begun to lilt) -we care about you down here at the library, Mr. Rafferty.
RAFFERTY: If you really cared about me, you-d-
MISS FIDDITCH: (Urgent) Anything. Except let you destroy yourself. (Becomes businesslike). Besides, somebody has to watch the store while I go to lunch, don't they?
RAFFERTY: (Grudgingly) Yes, Miss Fidditch.
MISS FIDDITCH: In the meantime, to keep you out of trouble, I have three carts of books that have to go up on the second floor to be shelved. You can do that this morning, and at noon you can relieve me at the desk. We mustn't get backlogged in the stacks, you know.
RAFFERTY: Yes, Miss Fidditch. (Fade begins.)
MISS FIDDITCH: Good. Now, here are the carts. I'll help you wheel them to the service elevator, and you can take them up to the- (Fade out.)

RAFFERTY
(Voice-over narration:)
I took the service elevator up to the second floor and covered up there just long enough for Fidditch to turn her back and head for the desk. Then I punched the button for the basement and took a trip down to the morgue. (Elevator cables buckling, then the racket of doors) The library's newspaper morgue, that is. I wheeled the cart of books into the basement. I wasn't surprised to see the library janitor, an old guy named "Red Brown", asleep in a pile of newspapers. I thought about how it was funny that the nickname of "Red" had stuck with the old codger even after his hair had gone white- but there was no time to waste on such seemingly irrelevant trivia. I punched the elevator button and then dispensed with the task of putting the books away. (Sound of Rafferty punching the button. Creak of elevator. Rumble of books.)

RED BROWN: Hey- why are you dumping all those books down the elevator shaft?
RAFFERTY: New storage procedures, Mr. Brown. Go back to sleep.
RED BROWN: Does Miss Fidditch know about this? If she doesn't know about this, she'll-
RAFFERTY: Can it, grandpa. If Fidditch finds out, you'll be collecting your pension. (Pause, tone changes to subtle threatening) You see, Mr. Brown, I am privy to the deception you have foisted on Miss Fidditch.
RED BROWN: (Haltingly) You- are?
RAFFERTY: You bet. Isn't it true, Mr. Brown, that you are actually sixty-seven years old- two years past the mandatory retirement age for library janitors in this state?
RED BROWN: Well- yes. But how did you know that?
RAFFERTY: Simple, Brown. As a special investigator, my analytical powers have been sharpened to a razor thin edge. I have a mind like a steel trap, Brown- quick enough to catch the fact that the skin on your neck bears the unmistakable traces of having at one time worn dogtags. As your personnel file makes no mention of military service, that leaves at least two years conveniently unaccounted for. I would furthermore wager that your attempt to expunge your military record indicates that you were less than honorably discharged. Am I getting warm, old man?
RED BROWN: All right. What is it that you want?
RAFFERTY: I want some help with a little bit of local history, pops. Namely, some names.
RED BROWN: Shoot.
RAFFERTY: William Killigrew, or some broad named Veronica. Or Violet.
RED BROWN: Never heard of 'em.
RAFFERTY: Maurice Ringer?
RED BROWN: Nope.
RAFFERTY: Eddie Monk?
RED BROWN: I don't think so- wait. Monk, you said?
RAFFERTY: That's right, You've heard of him?
RED BROWN: Sure. It was in this morning's paper. This Monk guy got decapitated. The paper said that they got a prime suspect who used to be a detective in the police force.
RAFFERTY: Did they give his name?
RED BROWN: It said they couldn't, 'cause he was just still a suspect. Say- you was on the police force 'til you got transferred to library, wasn't you?
RAFFERTY: That's what gives me a personal interest in this particular
case, Grampa. I came down here to do some research, and right now I'm enlisting your services.

RED BROWN: What do you want?

RAFFERTY: I want every Sunday paper for the last forty years. I particularly want the Entertainment pages and the Metro section - Today, pops.

RED BARON: Well- right. Of course. Right away...

RAFFERTY

(Voice-over narration)

Red Brown was a scared old bird and now I had him eating out of my hand- running around for those newspapers like a Christmastime postal clerk on little white pills. Inside of fifteen minutes I had an edition of every local Sunday paper published in the last forty years, and the old man was so exhausted that he collapsed and took a nap on the concrete floor. (Brown gasps, collapses: Sound of Rafferty turning pages; this accelerates until it gets ridiculously fast at the end of the following narration). I read those papers for hours, searching for some reference to Killigrew, Ringer, or Monk. I was just about to give up when the hunch paid off. It was on the Metro page- a five column story about the sentencing of a local mobster for the crime of murder one: the mobster was none other than "Mauling Mo" Ringer. That was some thirty seven years ago, and Ringer had drawn a life sentence for confessing for giving a certain Freddy Harring a burial at sea- before Freddy was dead. The papers didn't have anything else on Ringer for the next thirty-two years, but than a little article about as big as your thumb announced that Mr Ringer was being paroled. After that the name of "Maurice Ringer" began appearing in the ad for Marko's Place, and it seemed like he'd left a life of crime behind for a career in comedy. (Suddenly stops turning pages. There is snoring in the background. Rafferty muses:)

But why had Mauling Mo Ringer confessed to the Herring murder in the first place? Herring's body had never been found, and the articles made no references to any eye-witnesses at the trial-

MISS FIDDITCH: (Her voice echoes down the shaft) Mister Rafferty? Mister Rafferty, are you down there? It's twelve o'clock and you have to watch the desk while I go to lunch.

RAFFERTY

(Voice-over narrative)

My mind was going over the case like a finely tuned lawn mower, but when Miss Fidditch called down that elevator shaft the blades hit a tree stump. It was twelve o'clock, and I had to watch the desk while she went to lunch.

RAFFERTY: Coming, Miss Fidditch. (Footsteps, snoring; sharp thud.)

RED BROWN: (Comes out of his snoring) Oomph! (Raspy) What- what is it.

RAFFERTY: Nap time is over. Back to the broom, pops.

(SUSPENSEFUL FANFARE)

Scene Two

(Change in background ambience; a less muted, unfiltered quality to the sound.)

TELEPHONE: RRRIIIIINNNNNNGGGGGG———RRRIIIIN———

RAFFERTY: (Click of the receiver, then:) Officer Rafferty, front desk.

CHILD CALLER: Hello?

RAFFERTY: Hello. Rafferty speaking. Can I help you?

CHILD CALLER: Is this the library?

RAFFERTY: That's right. What can I do for you?

CHILD CALLER: I want a book. It's one of the 'Tim Swift' books. It's called TIM SWIFT AND HIS ELECTRIC GRANDMOTHER. (Child breaks into giggle of laughter.)

RAFFERTY: I am quite certain that I do not recall a book in the Tom Swift series by that title, young lady.

CHILD CALLER: I'm not a girl, jerko.

RAFFERTY: I'm sorry. By the timbre of your voice, I naturally assumed.


RAFFERTY:

(Voice-over narration)

I hung up the phone. These phonecalls were beginning to seem less like a childish prank and more like- a subtle, veiled threat. Somebody was sending me a message, I figured. That's what it had to be, or it wouldn't make any sense. I added up the phone calls and the fact that I was on a trail that was red hot— well, it couldn't be a coincidence. I decided that it was high time to put a tracer on the library phone. (DIALS PHONE)

DISPATCHER: Thirteenth precinct. Can I help you?

RAFFERTY: Connect me to the Chief of Police, please.

DISPATCHER: Who is calling, please?

RAFFERTY: Tell him it's— an old friend, operator.

DISPATCHER: Just a minute (CLICK. MUZAK ON THE LINE. MUZAK INTERRUPTED BY SECOND CLICK.)
CHIEF: This is the Chief.
RAFFERTY: Hello, Chief?
CHIEF: Who's this?
RAFFERTY: This is Rafferty, Chief.
CHIEF: Who?
RAFFERTY: Rafferty.
CHIEF: Rafferty?
RAFFERTY: Rafferty.

CLICK AND DIAL TONE

RAFFERTY:

(Voice-over narration)
I hung up the phone. It was clear that I couldn't count on any help from the Chief— I was on my own. At least I'd pumped some information out of my mysterious caller: I knew that it was a "he." That was a start— it meant that approximately half my suspects were now disqualified. I looked up and saw Miss Fidditch enter the library. I'd need some quick thinking and good acting if I was going to hit the trail again before it turned cold, so I put on my unhappiest face and groaned hello.

RAFFERTY: Hello, Miss Fidditch.
RAFFERTY: I'm, (groan) — alright, Miss Fidditch.
MISS FIDDITCH: No. No you're not. Virgil, I think you should go home for the rest of the day. You can report back in the morning.
RAFFERTY: I'm really— (groan) —I'm really not sick, Miss Fidditch.
MISS FIDDITCH: I insist, Virgil. Here's your coat and hat— (Footsteps, fading voices.) —I want you to go straight home and get right to bed. You look peaked, Virgil...

RAFFERTY:

(Voice-over narration)
It was a cheap trick, but it worked. I was free again, and I decided to go back to Mr. Killigrew's house to see what more I could learn about my prime suspect in the Monk murder. I tried to figure out a good cover story, and then it hit me. I would tell Mr. Killigrew that I was a library representative who had come to collect his overdue books and fines. It was an airtight alias, and as I knocked on Killigrew's door I felt like all my bets were covered.

RAFFERTY: (Knocks) hello? (Knocks again) Mr. Killigrew? This is the library, Mr. Killigrew. You'd better open up. (To himself;) Hmmm. No answer. And the door is— unlocked. Well, well. Maybe I ought to take a little look-see. (Creak of door. We can now hear a record, softly skipping the same two words, "crimson and clover," over and over. Suspenseful flourish of trumpets and organ.)

RAFFERTY:

(Voice-over narration)
The first thing I saw was a bear rug on the floor— except this one still had a bear in it. It also had a leopard's head, and the leopard's head had gotten its ears pierced since I'd seen it last night — with what looked to be a single hollowpoint slug. Somebody apparently didn't like Mr. Killigrew's taste in exotic pets. I walked into the kitchen, and that was when I saw Killigrew. He was dead, of course, and he looked like he was auditioning for the heavy in _The Legend of Sleep Hollow_. To put it plainer, his head was missing. It was like a replay of what had happened at the Monk residence, except that this time Miss Cindy Staples wasn't around to leave her lunch at the scene of the crime. I got on the horn and dialed headquarters.

DISPATCHER: (After sound of dialing) Thirteenth precinct. Can I help you?
RAFFERTY: This is Rafferty. I want to report a murder. Get a few units over to 942 Lyndon Avenue. And make it quick, sweetheart. This guy's losing a lot of blood. (Click)

RAFFERTY:

(Voice-over narration)
I had a little time to kill while I waited for the cops, so I decided to check out the scene for evidence. All I came up with was Killigrew's stack of library books— books on neurosurgery. Books like _Are Brain Transplants Really Possible?_ and _How To Splice Spines_. When I looked at those titles, something clicked. (Click) After all, Killigrew was my prime suspect, and Killigrew was missing a head. (Whine of approaching sirens.) But I didn't have time to think about that now. The cavalry was coming, but somebody had already gotten away with a scalp. I put the books down, but then I noticed a bookmark in one of them. It was a business card, actually, for a certain "Doctor Vernon Thanatos, Animal Neurosurgeon." I slipped it into my pocket while the cops broke down the door.

(Crash of the door being broken down)

POLICEMAN #1: Alright, freeze!
POLICEMAN #2: Hands High!
RAFFERTY: Calm down, gentlemen. And put away those heaters, before somebody gets hurt.
POLICEMAN #1: Why, it's Rafferty!
RAFFERTY: Quite right, officer. And once again, I have beaten you to
the scene of yet another heinous crime.

POLICEMAN #2: Good lord. Another one without a head. What happened to him, Rafferty?
RAFFERTY: You can bet it wasn't his ticker, flatfoot.

POLICEMAN #1: Rafferty, I don't think you understand the kind of trouble you're in. The Chief figures that you killed that Monk character. Now you show up here, with the same M.O.— You know what it looks like, Rafferty?
RAFFERTY: Appearances can be deceiving, officer.

POLICEMAN #2: The Chief wants you to swing or fry, Rafferty. He doesn't care which, and he isn't about to quibble over appearances. You're under arrest, Rafferty. Two counts of Murder One.
RAFFERTY: If that's the game, we'll play it your way. But first- Do you mind if a condemned man goes to the bathroom?

(Footsteps, a door shuts, sound of running water.)

RAFFERTY: (Voice-over narration:) It was an old trick, but I was hardly surprised that they fell for it. If cops weren't cops, they'd be criminals. Because cops and criminals have the same psychology. And just like there's no such thing as the perfect crime, there's no such thing as the perfect cop. In fact, most cops score in the single digits on Stanford-Binet intelligence tests. I slid open the bathroom window, (Sound of window sliding open), climbed out on the ledge, and flushed the commode to cover for the noise of my two story jump. (Flush of toilet, appropriate ambience of falling and landing.) I hit the ground running. One glance at the address on the business card told me where I was going— to a veterinary clinic on the outskirts of town. Specifically, to the animal neurosurgery research lab of Doctor Vernon Thanatos. And it wasn't to get shots for any puppies.

Scene Three
(Forlorn blare of Foghorns: Sound of running and heavy breathing)

RAFFERTY: (Voice-over narration)
Doctor Vernon Thanatos had established his practice in a suspiciously unlikely location— a former fish packing warehouse that loomed like a huge gravestone over the fog shrouded pier. I didn't know what time it was because my watch had broken when I got run over by the bus, but I figured it must be sundown— the fog was thickening, darkening, and sticking to my skin like a slick mist of chicken sweat. I stopped running and ducked into a doorway across the busted up stretch of street, my eyes fixed on the single lite on the second story of the waterfront warehouse. A low, smooth shape moved through the gutter like a shadow. I figured it was either a particularly short-legged cat or a huge rat, and I felt a shudder shake me to the socks. Something big was about to happen. I could feel it. My trained detective's nose caught the unmistakable scent of danger— it smelled like a skunk. (FADE BACK INTO FOGHORNS, LAPPING WATER: A SUDDEN, OMINOUS STROKE OF ORCHESTRATION, THEN:)

SKUNKEET: (A shrill, croaking voice:) STUPID— J-E-R-R-K-K-K!

RAFFERTY: Who's there? Where are you?


RAFFERTY: (Getting panicked:) Who's there, I say!


RAFFERTY: Come out — In the name of the law.


RAFFERTY: (TENSE NOTE OF STRINGS: VOICE OVER NARRATION: ) That was when I saw it, in the gutter a few feet away. It had the body of a huge rat— but there was something else: its head. I'd never seen anything like it. Where there should have been fur there were bright green feathers. Instead of the sharp yellow teeth of a rodent, a clawlike beak snapped open like a spring-loaded pocketwatch.

SKUNKEET: STUPID — J-E-R-R-K-K-K! RAFFERTY: Aha. There you are. No doubt you are one of the perversely surgical creations of Doctor Thanatos — most likely escaped from your laboratory cage, and now scavenging the garbage on this wharf like a common rat.


RAFFERTY: You will probably be interested to know that I have already formed a few theoretical conjectures about the Doctor's operation. You, my feather-headed friend, are further evidence.


RAFFERTY: You, it seems, are a lower line product than your distant cousin with the bear's body and a leopard's head. Oh, yes. I met him, too. Surprised? You may be saddened to learn that somebody blew out its brains with a hollow-point slug — in the living room of William D. Killigrew. But maybe Killigrew is already a familiar name around the
haunts of Doctor Thanatos. Maybe you would recognize his face — if you were to have lately seen it sinisterey smiling from a disembodied head; kept alive, perhaps, in a bath of oxygenated blood; probably grinning at the punchline of the Cosmic Joke, and half mad with rage because he is now, quite possibly, at the mercy of Doctor Thanatos. Or perhaps Killigrew and Thanatos are in cahoots — You see, I already know far more than you suspect, you beady-eyed bird-brained rodent.

SKUNKEET: STUPID — JER-R-K-K-K!

RAFFERTY: Sticks and stones may break by bones, but names will never hurt me. Go ahead. Turn tail and report back to your master, your cretinous creature. Aha. I see you are not a rat at all, but a lowly skunk —

SKUNKEET: HIS-S-S-S——-

(RAFFERTY COUGHS, GAGS, FOGHORNS, ETC. FADE OUT INTO: )

RAFFERTY:

(Voice-over narration)

The stink-mist hit me like a ton of rotten carp. I went down on my knees and cleared my throat.

(FADE BACK INTO FOGHORNS, ETC.)


RAFFERTY:

(Voice-over narration)

Ralph didn’t show. So I staggered to my feet and stumbled out of the doorway. When I could open my eyes again the skunk was nowhere in sight, or I would have wrung it’s feathered neck. I picked up a tire-flattened paper carton of deli food or something, and I scraped the stuff off my suit while I watched the lit window of what I guessed was the evil laboratory of Doctor Thanaton. I decided that it might be a good idea to use the back door, and forego the formality of knocking. I tossed the deli carton, crossed the street, and made a smooth, crouching dart around the building.

(LOUDER FOGHORNS, LAPPING WATER, TAPPING FOOTSTEPS.)

The fog was thick, and it took me a moment to recognize the familiar sensation of having planks of wood underfoot. I was on a dock. I could dimly discern that the dock was laid out across the water like a huge square, as if it might be camouflaging the walls of some giant, underwater pen. I cautiously went further out on the dock, peering into the murky, lapping depths for the freakish sea-monster I was convinced must be lurking there.

(SUSPENSEFUL FOOTSTEPS. THEN. SNAP!)

RAFFERTY: ARRGGGHHH! My leg!

RAFFERTY:

(Voice-over narration)

That was when I felt it — the sharp crunch of something sinking its teeth into my leg. I looked down and saw what appeared to be the iron jaws of a bear trap, and then I saw the heavy chain that attached the bear trap to a huge anchor. My heart stopped when I noticed that the anchor was teetering on the edge of the door.

(LONG, LOW BLARE OF THE FOGHORN.)

I knew I had to get to that anchor. I pulled myself toward it on my belly, gritting my teeth and trying to avoid making the single, tiny vibration that might nudge the anchor out of its precarious balance — and into the water.

(SPLASH! KNOCKING CHAIN LINKS SLIDING OVER THE EDGE—)

RAFFERTY:

(Voice-over narration)

When I saw that anchor sink I knew that there was one last chance of escaping certain doom. It was a cheap trick, but it just might work.

RAFFERTY: HEL-L-L-P! HEL-L-L-—

SPLASH!

(MOURNFUL FOGHORN. GURGLE OF BUBBLES. DARK CHORDS OF AN ORGAN THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING NARRATION.)

ANNOUNCER:

(Voice-over narration)

Will this be the end of Virgil Rafferty, Public Library? Will he end up as fish food for one of Doctor Thanaton’s hideous creations? And how, if he does die, has Rafferty been narrating long segments of Our Story So Far? For the answer to this and other intriguing questions, stay tuned. We’ll be right back — after this brief intermission.

(FANFARE AND CRESCEndo.)

INTERMISSION

Russell Fox
Daisy

I found a daisy
She loves me, she loves me not
I picked it carefully
She loves me, she loves me not
I plucked it slowly
She loves me, she loves me not
I watched it closely
She loves me, she loves me not
I finished it finally
She loves me, she loves me not
I walked away silently.

Gary Gibson
Go Directly to Jail  
Do Not Pass Go  
Do Not Collect $200

Caryn and Bill Wells invited the Coughlins, Joan and Lee, to come to their apartment next door after dinner and share a bottle of wine. An hour or so of light babble at one another, and the conversation between the two single-sex dyads began to grow slack. Bill left the room for a moment and returned carrying a worn looking Monopoly set.

"Caryn and I used to play this a lot when we first got together, but then I got bored. That was until we found out how much fun it was to play with someone else." Bill winked carefully at Joan, who smiled in return.

Lee and Caryn climbed to the floor, taking places beside the round coffee table, and began to set up the board and playing pieces.

"Anyone else want more wine?" Bill clumsily collected glasses. "Honey?" He spoke to Caryn.

"Sure." She handed over her glass and smiled, her expression the result of her blind faith. Joan walked towards Bill.

"Let me help you with those before you break something." Bill handed a few glasses to her, and their eyes met in the exchange.

"Lee, why don’t you be banker?" Caryn suggested, handing him the tray of money.

"No, I really don’t..." He objected. His facial expression tightened, and his face lost its healthy color.

"C’mon, Lee, you do it everyday, you’re a natural." She was so interested in the game, she hadn’t noticed his reaction.

Lee counted out four shares of money in silence. He was by trade a banker, but had discovered recently that any contact with currency made him extremely uncomfortable. He thought back to the problems at the bank; all those numbers, so easily confused. He remembered the questioning; then he reminded himself: this is only a game.

Muffled giggles drifted out from the kitchen, but neither Caryn nor Lee acknowledged them. When the wine-bearers finally returned, they all picked markers. Lee grabbed the race car, Joan the top hat; Bill chose the terrier, and Caryn, the iron.

They played for twenty minutes or so, their conversation solely about the game. The novelty was fading before an hour had passed. Bill landed on chance and drew a card: ‘You are assessed for street repairs...’ He quickly slid the orange card back into the pile, announcing:

‘Advance token to nearest railroad.’

‘Who wants to order a pizza?’ Caryn untangled herself from her position half-under the table, and started flipping through the telephone book.

‘I could go for a bite right about now.’ Joan stared teasingly at Bill, while under the table the toe of her left foot traced along the upper portion of his ankle.

‘Me, too.’ Lee concentrated on counting out some money for a utility. He was forty-five dollars short, with the rest of his property already mortgaged. He considered asking his wife for the money. Instead, he tossed what he had into the Bank box; promising to pay it back soon.

‘Yeah, double cheese with pepperoni on half, what? Right, okay, thanks.’ Caryn hung up the phone and returned to the game.

Their stomachs were growling in anticipation when the downstairs buzzer sounded. Caryn jumped up, happy for a reason to ignore her rent responsibilities on Atlantic Avenue, one of Joan’s properties.

She hit the button to allow the delivery boy through the front entrance. She grabbed her purse from the closet shelf. Sifting through, she found a ten-dollar bill and several singles.

‘Honey, do you have any money?’ I’m a little bit short.’

‘Yeah, no problem.’ Bill stood, pulling his wallet from his hip pocket. He pulled out a five spot and four singles, and handed them to her.

‘Thanks.’ Caryn took the money and trotted to the front door. She stood on tip toes and looked through the peep hole, opening the door without letting the delivery boy knock.

Before replacing his wallet in his pocket, Bill quickly counted off the contents. Ten, thirty, fifty, seventy, ninety, ninety-five, ninety-eight; he was planning on meeting Joan one afternoon this week for a fancy luncheon, the electric bill would wait.

‘Okay, where was I?’ He returned his attention to the game.

‘You were about to buy a hotel,’ Joan proclaimed, always aware of Bill’s affairs.
“Well, I don’t know,” Bill shuffled through his staggering pile of play money. “Couldn’t I just rent a room?” He winked again at Joan.

Joan glared across the table at him for being so bold, but she relaxed when she glanced to her husband, who was preoccupied with figuring out his ten-percent income tax.

Not revealing her disheartenment, she looked back at Bill and nodded. Once again, in silence they made a date.

“Five-sixty-nine? Here—” Caryn tucked a five dollar bill and seventy-five cents into the outstretched hand, “keep the change.” She pulled the pizza through the doorway and shut the door. The extra four dollars slid comfortably into her pocket.

“It’s munchie time,” Caryn sang—to herself as much as to anyone else. The two men joined her by the kitchen counter. Joan took her turn, rolling a three and a four. This count landed her on New York Avenue.

“Damn, damn, damn.” Her view shot back to the three hovering individuals devouring the pizza. She slid her marker back a space, and adjusted the die.

“I’m buying St. James Place!” She let them all know.

“Okay, babe—just throw the money in the bank,” Lee called back to her. The telephone in the hallway rang, and Caryn choked down the remainder of her pizza slice before answering it.

“Yes he is...hold on a second, Lee? It’s someone from the bank.”

“Calling here?” Lee was startled.

“I left this number on the answering machine,” Joan offered as she wandered past him into the kitchen to grab her share of pizza.

‘Just great’, Lee thought as he dragged the phone down the narrow hallway, in the opposite direction from the kitchen; attempting to pull himself out of earshot of the others.

“Yes?” His voice shuddered slightly. “Frank, I can’t believe you have the balls to call here!” He gritted his teeth, stifling a shout. “I don’t care how you...” He was pacing now.

“I know Frank, do you really think I’m...Who was back in tonight? No, Simpson’s the Director, the other guy’s the exec-manager. What’d you say to them? Did they use the terminal? Did they check records?? Talk up Frank, I can’t hear you...”

Lee leaned back against the wall and was silent for several minutes. He held the receiver to his ear, but spoke in a low tone, to himself.

“Tonight would have been the last change...I could, yeah, I could wait on it...What?!” Lee tried to straighten up off the wall too quickly and almost lost his balance. “Fine, tell me later, I’ll get back.”

Very slowly Lee hung up the phone. He stood for a second in the dark, with his hand on the receiver. Then, he thought of ‘the machine’, and he headed out the door.

“I’ll be back in a minute, I have to check out a few papers back at our place, bank business. Joan, you can move for me, okay?” Joan broke her gaze away from Bill.

“Yes, sure.” Lee ran next door. Once inside his apartment, he slid past the couch to the telephone, and clicked off the ‘answer’ function of the machine, and pushed down ‘rewind’.

From the machine came some clicking sounds, and then the annoying sound of the tone, followed by several dial tones and more clicks. These were the results of people calling and then hanging up.

With only the foyer light on in the apartment, the darkness outside was clear, even to Lee’s horrified gaze. His breathing grew more rapid when he recognized the Bank Director’s silver Cadillac, parked in front of their complex. As he stared, a police car pulled into place directly behind it. Lee was confused, he thought he had answered all their questions, just perfectly. Then a shaky voice on the machine pulled things together.

“I’m sorry, Lee—somehow they knew too much and they startled me when they came in tonight. I guess I didn’t even look up before...” Lee turned his head to look at the machine. "...before I said your name, they figured it out, I just had to tell them..." The voice shook and fell to a low whisper. "I’m really sorry.”

After a few moments the tone came back on the machine, but Lee didn’t notice. His thoughts were on another machine, a computer, and the access code he had ‘accidentally’ discovered. Someone lost their job, because he altered a few totals, and Lee was promoted. A couple months later, a few more adjustments, and Lee was up for another raise.

These thoughts carried Lee far away from the apartment, where he sat-daydreaming a nightmare.

He didn’t see the sudden blackout across the alleyway in the Wells apartment, or even consider why Bill hadn’t paid their electric bill. And he didn’t know when the lights went out, if Bill grabbed his own wife; or his beloved Joan. He only knew, the game was over.

Susan Hilton
Crab Apple Wars

"I know, we'll cross the Nekong Delta. We'll take them across that swamp at the bottom of Elmer Hill."

"No, not again..." 

Danny Lewis and I were getting bored with playing with our "GI-Joes" in my backyard. This was strange because Danny could almost always come up with great ideas for us to do with them. While my father was a civilian who worked at the air base, his was a captain stationed there. I've lived in this town all my life, but Danny and his family had been all over the world. I figured that they had seen just about everything there was to see, or knew all there was to know. Anyway, Danny sure knew lots about the military and soldiers and the war that was going on.

One of his best ideas was the time we took a couple of our old "GI-Joes" that we didn't want anymore and threw baggies of gasoline at them, and lit them, and pretended they were caught in a napalm attack.

But that afternoon we couldn't come up with any good ideas for the "GI-Joes." We tried to think of other things to do.

"How about catch?" I said.

"Nope."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to, okay? Danny said, "I know, let's play Secret Agents."

"No, I don't want to, okay?"

"Don't get all snotty with me, Billy. Then how about Kick the Can? We could try that."

"There's no one around but us." I said.

"We could go swimming," Danny suggested.

"No, it's too cold and I'm just getting over--" 

I was cut off by the roar of a B-52's engines starting down on the runway about a mile and a half from my house. We both turned to look in the direction of the base to see the big bomber rise up over the treetops.
The difference between the B-52’s and the smaller jet fighters was that all over town you could hear the bombers starting for a few minutes before they ever took off. You could still hear them humming in your ears after they were gone. The jet fighters would surprise you. They would shoot up into the air above the trees like arrows, silent at first, and a blast of sound would follow them, a few seconds behind.

After a while we saw the bomber rise above the trees like a fat slow bird; it looked so low we wondered how it stayed in the air. It looked so large and hung so low it seemed you could reach up and grab it.

I reached down and picked up two crab apples that had fallen from the tree in my yard. I threw one of these at the bomber. Before I could throw the other, Danny grabbed my arm and screamed:

"No, don’t! That’s one of our boys. You can’t do that, Billy. I’ll betcha my Daddy’s flying that one!"

I threw the other apple at the side of my garage.

"I know,” Danny said, “we can have a crab apple war.”

When we had these crab apple wars we would scrounge up a bunch of kids and gather up a lot of apples from the tree in my yard. Then we would form teams and make up a lot of rules to try to control the war. Some of these rules were pretty stupid. One was that you couldn’t hit anyone in the head, which was stupid because you knew you were going to get beaned somehow.

“No, we can’t. I already told you; there’s no one around.”

“Well, we have to figure out something for just the two of us.” Danny said. “I know, we’ll be a two-man guerilla team!”

“A what?”

“Look, I know all about them. I heard about them on TV. Just stuff a lot of apples in your pockets and come one. I’ll tell you more as we go along.”

A few minutes later we were crouched behind some bushes watching the road about a block from my house. A guy a few years older than me and Danny was coming down the road on a bicycle.

“Look at him. He’s got to be a messenger for the Reds. Who else could ride through this territory so safe and unprotected?” Danny said.

I laughed.

When the cyclist got up to us Danny whispered, "Let ‘im have it!” and we both threw handfuls of crab apples at the cyclist.

“Eat lead, Charlie!” I yelled.

The cyclist fell off his bike into the gravel on the side of the road. He got up and both his knees and his elbows were scraped and starting to bleed. He started to come after us and Danny and I took off.

In one yard a big dog chased us out and in another we were sprayed by a lawn sprinkler as we ran back to my house.

“You know, you really screwed up back there,” Danny said, catching his breath, leaning against the work bench in my garage.

“What do you mean?”

"Yelling out like that. It gave us away. You know what happens to people who screw up in war...”

“Screw up in war? Where do you get this stuff from? This is just a game. Besides, the guy knew where the apples came from, anyway. He could tell,” I said.

”...they wind up dead,” Danny said, not listening. “There’s no excuse for screwing up, my Daddy tells me. Especially if it endangers a buddy. No excuse at all.”

After a while, when we thought things had cooled down, we went out back, gathered more apples and took off again.

On the next street over we saw two girls playing with dolls. One of them I knew from school but I didn’t know the other.

“Come on, let’s get the other.” Danny said.

“No, let’s leave them alone. Why should we get them?”

“They could be Viet Cong sympathizers. I heard on the news and from my Daddy that you can never tell who the enemy is.”

“Well, I don’t think we should hit them; it seems stupid and senseless to me.”

“What are you, yellow?” Danny said. "Well, I’m going to."

We hid around the side of a house and Danny threw apples at the two. He managed to hit the girl that I don’t know in the side of the head. She started crying.

When the girls looked over in our direction Danny pushed me out from the side of the house so they could see me.
As we ran off I heard the girl from school yell:
"Billy Thomas, I'm going to tell!"

We ran to a group of trees in a field nearby and I pushed Danny against one of them.
"Why did you push me out there? Now I'm going to get in trouble and I didn't do anything!"

"Those are the breaks, Billy Boy! You have to look out for number one in battle," Danny laughed. "Besides, isn't it pretty funny, anyway?"

"No, I don't think it is funny at all. And hanging around with you isn't really fun anymore. But I do think this is funny," I said and I threw a crab apple, a real ripe one, at his chest.

The apple mashed and made a reddish-purple stain on Danny's shirt.
"Aw, man, why'd you go and do that? This is a brand new shirt. Mom just bought it for me at Monkey Wards. Mom and Dad are going to kill me for this!"

"Don't be such a cry-baby," I said. "It'll come out. Besides, you got wet from that sprinkler and that didn't bother you."

"This'll never come out. They're gonna kill me!"

"Shut up, you cry-baby!" I said.

"Don't call me a cry baby!" Danny punched me in the chest. "Come on," he said. "Let's go get some more apples."

I started walking in the other direction. I had had it with playing with Danny Lewis.

"Hey," Danny yelled, "You can't walk away! That's desertion! Come back here!"

Danny threw crab apples at me, but I kept walking.
I spent the rest of the afternoon killing time, looking at magazines in a drug store nearby. After awhile the manager kicked me out, saying:
"Come on, kid, this isn't a library."

I dreaded going home. By now the girl from school had told her mother who, in turn, had probably called my mother.

I had watched enough TV myself and had learned enough from Danny to know what war crimes councils were like. I could already hear my mother saying:
"William Thomas, you just wait until your father hears about this."

Steve Cornish
Getting to God

And this is the way
we get to God
and this is the Elder
who holds the Wednesday night
youth Bible studies--
a tall, athletic man
with kind eyes--
the circle of folding chairs
with eager, frightened
children in them
eating the words of scripture
as if they had starved
for years,
and this is the way
they play games
with the young ones,
read stories and sing songs--
psalms to Christ--
here there will be acceptance,
Christ is forgiving of all sin--
He stood on a mountain in
the wilderness and fought
off Satan for us, and died
for us, and we must give ALL
to Christ
and he died also
for the advantage of false
prophets to come,
and this is the way
they convince you
that your money is Christ's money,
all of it,
and this is the way
they send you into the country
to kneel and pray
in the sunshine

and they tell you
EXACTLY where your place is
in God's Kingdom,
and this is the way
they call relatives and friends
unholy, until you almost
believe it, and they tell you
who you WILL marry--
you sleep on a mattress
in the corner of a room
and wake at five
to read scripture and pray
silently before breakfast,
then you scrub sinks and tubs
and floors until
your hands crack, hoping
that they will be clean enough,
all sacrifices for Christ,
and this is the way
you pray to God
and find out that
THEY don't care for Christ,
and they drive expensive cars
and use your money
for an overseas fund,
or something,
and this is the way
that there are MORE meetings
and less time and you serve
and serve, and serve until you fall--
or until they ask for more
or until you run away as far
as you can--
and suddenly meet God
and THIS is the way
we get to God.

Maxine Petry
Resurrection Of An Old Lover

You will not say why you have come.

You smile and spiders bristle past your teeth, your eyes fill with tears or ice cubes or small chunks of glass---I cannot tell---why don't you go away, why must you stand with your shroud of hair filling the room with shadows and the mask of old lovemaking? You smile like a knife wound. I bury my head beneath the blankets but you slip in beside me like wind, I clench my eyes tight and you pry them open. You start grinning, the spiders swarm the walls, flood over the blankets, and you are pointing and laughing and will not say why you have come.

Jonathan Hazelton

In my second novel, the narrator at eight takes apart his grandfather's circular saw looking for the sawdust, certain that there is a baggy or compartment inside that holds the sawdust until it is sucked out by the spinning blade of the saw. He doesn't find it. Still, despite the facts learned in school, he says, he believes the dust is there and he continues to take things apart to find out their secrets. "The only difference," he adds, "is that what was awe at not finding the secret at eight years of age has become quiet rage, capable of fury only when I try to explain, which I can't help trying to do...."

As I think of ways to explain leaving Oswego, I have to laugh at my instinct to become sloppily sentimental as I try to find a way to thank my colleagues and students. But after three years of wheedling, cajoling, carping, and demanding from my students that they try to see as clearly and coldly as possible, to become sentimental would be cheating. Harry Crews, whom I admire, once said that he did not write stories about people to understand them so much as to learn to live with them. When I think of all of you who have been or who are my students, think of the looks on your faces as the voltage of your perceptions suddenly increased — through your own hard work — I know that I have enjoyed living with you during this short story of three years at Oswego. You have accepted the burdens of talent and you have used your talents as a proper means of exchange. In this issue of the Great Lake Review, I think the editors have managed to represent the breadth and significance of those talents, the depth of which is a compliment and reward to ALL of your teachers at Oswego. Your teachers have done their best job. To them, especially to you, as I pop like a tart from the toaster of Oswego and go off in search of that sawdust, I want to say goodbye, good luck, and thanks.

W. S. Penn