Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

from The Dead
by James Joyce
Edited by
Robert Miller

Assistant Editors ... Dan Anderson
Susan Hubbard
Aileen Goldberg

Copyright 1981

This magazine is made possible by funds provided by
the Student Association of the State University of New York
College at Oswego

Advisor ..................................... William Penn

Poetry
Russell Fox ................. The Wintress ................. 2
Steve Gerry ................. White, Red...Red, White .... 9
Jackie Klippenstein .... Summerghosts ................. 10
Russell Fox ................. Burke Road ................. 12
Natalie Siembor ....... Laughter ................. 14
Bobbie Honig .......... Untitled ................. 17
Bobbie Honig .......... Untitled ................. 18
Suzanne Shane ......... The Telling ................. 27
Mike Jennings .......... Six Tenant Farmers Without Farms,
Hardman County, Texas, 1938 ... 28
S. J. Murabito .......... Andy Capp ................. 31
S. J. Murabito .......... Dagwood Bumstead ................. 32
Steve Geary .......... Traces ................. 33

Fiction
Robert O'Connor .......... The Vigil ................. 3
S. J. Murabito .......... Shade Maker ................. 20

Artwork
Wendy Stencik .......... Acid Rain Series #1 .......... Cover
Robert Glick .......... Nicki ................. 1
Tori Wysochanski ...... I grew up believing ... 11
Peter Valenti .......... Beginnings ................. 13
Robert Glick .......... Models and Me ................. 15, 16
Marlene S. Hamann .... Passing Time ................. 19
Wendy Stencik .......... Oswego ................. 30
The Wintress

Imagine a woman
stepping carefully to
her wooden threshold.
She lives alone,
they talk about her in the town;
she keeps her house upon some weary
western mountain.

I await her at the edges,
hers companion.

Her footsteps quicken
like the changing of the season
as she sees me standing
with the bracelets that I’m wearing
and my finest dress on.

I will cook her some good food
to make her warm.
I will unlace her shoes
for they are worn from many roads
she can’t afford.

There is a wind
that breathes through all the different trees
as she unties her whitened hair
and leaves her long skirts full and flying
all along the forest paths.

She makes her way
across a lake of glass.

Russell Fox
The Vigil

I don’t like staying up all night. That’s a fact. But what would you do if your wife had been out the whole evening and you didn’t know where? First, let me get it straight: I don’t know much about women. Sometimes Mattie, she’s my wife, she’d say, “Crew, you don’t know me at all, you don’t know the first thing about me.” I don’t know how that makes me feel, but it’s not too good, really. So maybe I don’t know women or Mattie too well, but I think that anybody could see that if your wife had been out all night and you waited up for her, you’d have a right to be worried.

The sun started rising here at around ten after five. It comes over the bend where my porch sags, hangs a bit in the trees, and by the time it clears the ground and shrubs, it’s about seven-thirty. That’s what time it is now. Seven-thirty and I’m sitting in my house, right off Route 48, and I’m facing the doorway.

The evening didn’t start out bad. We were going to a party. It was one of those parties where people stand around drinking for the first part of the party; and when they get tired of that they start dancing. Mattie decked herself out for this party. Like I said, if I knew more about women, I might’ve noticed the extra sprays and makeup she stuck on herself—but I didn’t, so there’s no use fussing over it. I have a ’68 Chevy Biscayne that I’ve had ever since I’ve known Mattie. It’s a bit of a heap now, the tires are bald, and it gets stuck sometimes, but it runs okay. After we got dressed we went to the party. I let Mattie off right in the front so I could park someplace that wasn’t muddy. When I got back though, she wasn’t around at all. Couldn’t find her anywhere.

A lot of people I could name wouldn’t put up with this business for a minute. There’s Joey Simpson, he’s boss over me down at the Shell station. Mattie’s lucky she never tried him. He had a woman bothering him—just a girlfriend, mind—not even a wife. And his girlfriend, he found out one day, was stepping out on him. So he set himself to figuring. He sat down and he figured that his girlfriend couldn’t help it because she had a better car than he did. She had a Mercury, and she kept it shined good. He had a dirty little Dodge pickup that wasn’t worth parts. A car like hers, he figured, roomy, with no seatbelts in the back, just made her want it. It was a crazy, dumb notion, but that’s the only kind Joey has. Once he sticks an idea into his head, it rattles around there and never gets shaken out. So instead of blaming his girlfriend, her name was Alice something or other, he blames her car. So one day he calls her up and asks her what she’s doing with her Mercury that day. She says, “Nothing,” and he hangs up. Right after that Joey left the gas station. I should say right now I lent him the dime for the phone call, so that kind of makes me an accessory; but then how was I supposed to know what he was setting himself to do? I don’t know about these things, and Joey’s even harder to figure than Mattie. So Joey drove over to her car and planted a bomb in it. I don’t know how he made it, but it was good enough to blow her engine dear into the backseat. Nobody got hurt, but when the police and fire trucks came around, Joey got so excited he drove by in his truck and hollered out the window, “I did it, I blew it up—it was me!” They took time off from fighting the fire to collar Joey, but nobody had seen him do it. And once they started talking confession, Joey shut up. So he’s still at Shell with me, although I think he got himself a new girlfriend who has a bike. I still don’t see how anybody could hold a car responsible for a girlfriend stepping out. Don’t see it at all. If Mattie had tried him on as a husband, there’s no telling what would’ve happened.

I know when the sun moves, so do the shadows. It’s hard to keep track unless I’m watching close. There isn’t much inside the house to look at. We’ve hung up a few pictures, one of Mattie and me at Niagara Falls—the American side. Over on the other wall there’s a charcoal one I made an artist
draw of her when we went to that Pilgrim village on the bus tour. We got all those pictures from times when things were kind of happy. But you get used to looking at those things after awhile, and don't notice them unless you keep getting new ones.

When I couldn't find Mattie I got worried so I came home. I opened the front door so I had a clear view of the porch and yard, and I sat myself in the rocking chair facing the doorway. I got the little corner table out from beside the couch and decked it out with a bottle of Scotch and a glass full of ice. From the window on the side of the house, there'd be a breeze, but it was so hot it couldn't cool me off. I took off my shirt and laid it on the arm of the chair, and that made me feel a little bit better. The breeze would come in the window and onto the back of my head and shoulders, but even with my shirt off, all that happened was it made me sweat. It was while I was there I thought of my plan for when Mattie would come in. You can't rush ahead without a plan for someone like Mattie because Mattie's a class girl after all. What I figured I would do was take her by the shoulders and shake her. I figured when you shake an apple tree what happens first is the rotten apples fall out. If you keep shaking, you never know what comes down next. So I figured maybe I could just shake the truth out of Mattie. It might work with women just as good as with trees, and besides I didn't have another plan.

I was getting real tired about the time the sun came up. The birds started raising cain and all the dust in the air got lit up by the sun, like millions of little fireflies. It was about eight, I first heard the crunching of gravel in the driveway, and I knew she'd come.

I've got to admit, I still wasn't ready for her. Maybe I hadn't drunk enough, or maybe I wasn't mad enough, or maybe I don't know what. I heard the car door slam, but I didn't know whose car it was left her off. I saw Mattie just as she was coming up the stairs, and she must've known I was there. I'll say this for her: She didn't back down an inch. When she got to the doorway, she stopped, and stood there watching.

"Oh God," she said.
"What time is it," I said, in a plain tone.
"Oh God," she went again.
"I asked what time it is," I said. "You know damn well what time it is.
"You're awfully late getting home," I said. I noticed her hair was bunchy, like she'd been sweating a lot.
"I'm early," she said. "I thought you'd be asleep."
"I bet you did," I said. I got up from my chair. I was ready to shake her, I swear I was. That's what I had set my mind on doing, and that's what I was going to do. But when I walked up close and was about to put my hands on her shoulders, she said, "I know what you're going to ask, and I don't want to hear it. I don't want to discuss it at all."
"Why not?" I asked. That stopped me. I don't know why.
"You mean you've been waiting up all this time?"
"Yep," I tried to sound proud, but it came out dumb.
"You mean you sat here the entire time with the door open, letting the wind blow everything around and the bugs get in?"
"I kept most of the lights off," I said. "I don't think any bugs got in."
"They only need one light. That's all they need is one. The pictures got blown around." She went over to the one of me and her standing on the roof of our house, right after we got married.
"You could've at least closed the door," she said.
"It was hot," I said. She straightened that one picture.
"That one's okay," she said. "Now all the rest of them are crooked." She went to the picture next to it, the one I took of her on Route 48 with her hat on, and her hair up.

I waited till she turned partway, "I want to know where you were and what you were doing?" I asked.
"You mean to tell me you were up the whole night?" she asked.
"I want to know," I said. I kept my voice even this time.
"I'm not going to talk about it." She finished straightening the pictures, and walked into the bathroom. I followed her and stood by the doorjam. She sat down hard on the toilet, pointing her legs towards the shower curtain that has the monkeys on it.

"Okay. I'll ask. Who were you with?" She pulled up her dress, then pulled down her stockings. There were runs in them, and I tried to remember whether they had been that way when we left.
"I had a good time, a real good time," she said. "You should've stayed."
"I couldn't find you, Mattie," I said. "You left." She stood up, held up her stockings and dress and threw them into a corner. She picked her bathrobe off the curtain rod and slung it over her shoulders. Then she ducked under my arm and walked into the bedroom without looking at me. I followed her, and when she dumped herself on the bed, I sat down next to her. I don't know if I was still mad or if I was just drunk.

"I want to know. Did you do anything?"
"Do what?"
"Anything."
"With who?"
"Anybody," I raised my voice. There was some ringing in my ears.
"No, I didn't, all right? Is that what you wanted to know? Are you happy now?"
"How am I supposed to feel with you out all night?" I asked. "Nobody I know would put up with that."

"I told you," she said. "I didn't do anything with anybody." She sat up in bed and propped the pillow against her back. I looked back at the mirror over the dresser. Both of us looked tired and mad, and it was still hot.

"How do I know you didn't?" I asked. "How can I be sure?"

"All right," she said. "I took twenty guys over to the barn by the edge of the party and did them all. Every last one. Does that satisfy you? Are you happy now?"

"Don't talk like that, Mattie," I said. I leaned closer to her till I could smell her body.

"Well, I just don't want to talk about it anymore. I've said all I'm going to say, and that's all."

I looked at her then. Her hair was a bit straggly, and through the window the light hung on her bathrobe.

"You're telling me lies, Mattie," I said. She turned away from me and put her hands under the side of her head. I reached over and grabbed her by the shoulder.

"Don't touch me," she said. I kept it close by her pillow.

"Are you lying to me, Mattie?" I asked. "If it's that you want somebody else, I'll go. You can have the house and the neighbors that talk about us. You can have them. I'm not going to put up with this anymore. Nobody I know would."

She turned, leaned on her elbow, and looked in my eyes. She crinkled up her nose and bit her lower lip, like she was thinking of something.

"What do they say?" she asked.

"Who?"

"The neighbors. What do they say?"

"I don't know. I never asked them," I said, "but they probably have lots to say about us."

"You're stupid," she said. "You know, you're really stupid. I have married an ignorant man."

"I may be stupid but I think I know when someone's stepping out on me," I said. I grabbed her by the shoulder again, this time hard.

If you touch me again, I'll hit you," she said. I kept my hand where it was, and she jumped out from under it, onto her knees. She swung her hand from behind her back and the flat of it caught me alongside my ear. I didn't stop her. I've been hit worse. She took a look at me for a minute, just stared me straight in the eye, and then banged her head down on my chest, right in the part where the crease was, and she started crying, making little gasp noises. She put her hands on top of my shoulders and leaned her weight against me. I felt my chest starting to get wet and some of the tears trickled down to my stomach. Her bathrobe was all crumpled and the sleeves had slid down to her elbows. I took my hands and put them behind her neck, and through her hair.

I looked up at the mirror again while I was holding her. I remembered when Mattie and me first got married, we took all our wedding pictures and scotch-taped them to the mirror till it was covered. We even had some extras, and we taped those to the wall alongside. When the tape got old, a lot of them fell off, and now the mirror's clear except for the yellow-tape mark leftovers. I like the mirror clear though, because that way I can watch Mattie sometimes without looking at her straightaways. She sure is beautiful if you see her and she doesn't know you're looking. So even though I don't think anybody would put up with her going out and doing things, maybe, with other people. I know I'm still luckier than most: and that I should be happy with what I've got.

"It's okay," I said, "it's okay. I believe you Mattie."

That didn't stop her from crying like I figured it would. We stayed there a long time--her sobbing--until my back hurt from being straight so long. I said I believed her partways because I did, and partways because every time I would close my eyes and try to see Mattie with somebody else, I'd have to open them because I couldn't. After awhile she let go of me and took to crying by herself on her side of the bed. I laid down next to her on my side. It took awhile for her to stop, but she did, after a bit. She fell asleep, and a little while later I pulled the covers up over us and made sure her feet were tucked under them. I put my arms around her and even though she was asleep, she nestled her cheek up to mine. Her breath was bad, and I suppose mine was too--with all I'd been drinking. I fell asleep after awhile, and it must've been pretty far into the afternoon when I woke up. She was still out. I like Mattie when she's like this. I ran my fingers under her bathrobe, real light, up and down, up and down. I ran them along her breasts and her stomach, down her neck to her back, where I felt the scratchmarks. I felt them up and down and up and down until the ends of my fingers got hot, then numb. In the middle of me stroking her, I must've been doing it too hard; she turned over onto her back. I saw she was sweating a lot, now, and I took my hand and wiped the water from above her eyes.

Robert O'Connor
White, Red

Cold, dark,
the lightning flash of headlights.
White, red,
a drunk is dead.
Winter snow,
a woman panics with fear.
White, red,
a bum is dead.
Push, shove,
close the coffin of snow.
White, red,
a bum is dead.
Ice man,
your bottled dreams have split.
White, red,
a bum is dead.

Red, White

Cold, dark,
a sobering woman is crying.
Red, white,
a flashing light.
Winter snow
silhouettes for her a man.
Red, white,
a flashing light.
Push, shove
and Presto! he is gone.
Red, white,
a flashing light.
Ice man:
"Have a drink my dear."
Red, white,
a flashing light.


Summerghosts

I can still see them
gliding insubstantially in tennies and exercise clogs
through the whitely upholstered landscape
Over concealed lawns and walks
ornamented now by a free-style artist
whose medium is meringue;
now sloshily violated by my boots
They saunter in the park
laughing phantoms in running shorts and T's
the hues of their summer plumage contrasting
water-color bright
against the blank sketchpad of snow
in my mind's eye
They loll
on the slope (once grassy)
facing the street of campus shops
strung like millefiore beads
books and litter scattered
like barrier reefs about them
the young men
infidel Israelites
adoring golden calves
and thighs
fringe-topped with denim
in procession on the pavement
I can still see them
pale shadows of a short season past
keeping me mindful
that my turn will come to walk
and laugh, as do they
as the winter-clad wraith of my self
hunched with cold in the humid air


Steve Geary

Jackie Klippenstein
Burke Road

Long after nightfall
years later:

And hearing the sounds
of pounding bare feet
against the latesummer's dust
of rural dirt roads:

And the pastures are brought to mind:

The tangled trees of barren orchards,
crumbled foundations, fallen chimneys,
the abandoned wells, and rusted barbed wire fences;

And the small cemetery, where smooth tombstones
are weathered almost illegible, bearing the names of local roads,
and are buried in the overgrowth of weeds and wild thorned roses.

Many nights I've walked these roads
filled with the smells of the graineries
and barns, and manure, and hay, and wildflowers.

Many nights I've heard again
the cows groan low beyond electrical fences.

And many nights since I've gone back to the barn
to swing from the loft
on ropes tied to rafters;

Long after nightfall,
years later.

Russell Fox
Laughter

I've heard of some laughter
Like tinkly silver bells
And still others that were
Like crystal clear
Mountain-snow-run rivers.

But my favorite laughter is
Like closed eyes
On a sunny-warm day;
Like the rippling of a pebble's
Pond-thrown after shock:
Yours.

Natalie Stembor
Never trust them. Men.
Never listen to their stories.
They'll wear lies and deceit upon their lips.
Hiding behind facades, so hard to diminish.

Never trust their so called “love”,
for it isn’t real.
They’ll be speaking of their eternal endearment,
when their eyes speak all they feel.

They tell me that the hate,
has overpowered past love.
They expect for me to wait,
for their hearts to be sewn up.

Waiting eternities,
to gain their so called “trust”.
While my hate builds,
while my heart rusts.

Now I wear the deceit,
and I fell the hate.
That all you men speak of,
while I sit here and wait.

Bobbie Honig

I've waited for you
to come back to me,
for endless hours and days
that stand so still.

I've waited for you
like a child waits for
his mother, to come home
from the grocery store.

I've waited for you,
and I keep on waiting.
And all along you don’t
even know, that I
wait for you. But
you never do arrive. Only
in my wildest, wickedest dreams,
you finally do come.

Bobbie Honig
Ralph sat on the window ledge of the third floor bathroom, smoking a cigarette. Someone had scratched a giant "30" into the wood by the window frame. Ralph felt he knew who did it; it was Romeo of Maintenance. He had won a lot of money on the Superbowl and bragged about it all last week. Just because the final score was 30-24, all of a sudden 30 was Romeo’s lucky number and everyone needed to be reminded of it. Ralph thought, by seeing it all over the plant, scratched and engraved here and there. He thought it was foolish for a fifty year-old man to carry on like that. He couldn’t figure it out.

Dried Milkweed seeds hung in a web on the window. At first glance, Ralph thought they were small spiders with shattered legs.

It was Monday morning, 6:45. Ralph always sat in the bathroom for about twenty minutes before actually going to his Aurora window shade machine. He didn’t have much of a chance to hang around with the other operators; they were, for the most part, just on time, arriving to work a few minutes before seven each day.

Chauncey O’Donnel, the four-feet six-inch operator they called "Little Irish", was at his machine setting rollers in the bin on top of his Aurora. He was the first to work each day. He was also the oldest employee in the plant. He worked there for forty years. Ralph thought he came to work early every day because he felt self-conscious about his height. John, the operator who ran the Aurora in front of Ralph, would say, "Naw, he comes in here early to get away from his wife. The thing is, ya see, is he’s got so much time off comin’ an’ he’ll never use it."

Ralph listened to Little Irish make noises and sing to himself. Ralph pictured his smile. He smiled. He looked out over the river and the bridge and watched the small city begin to pulse, to get to its feet. He heard the
elevator door slam and the voices of most of the other operators and the ladies who also worked in the third floor Mounting Department.

When he left the bathroom, the others were at their machines churning out various sized window shades. He went to his Aurora and felt as though something valuable had been completed and set into action.

He unwound the salmon colored cloth from its spool at the far end of the machine and fed it up through the intermeshed rollers at the operator's end of the machine. He hit the feed button and the rollers pushed six inches of material through. He placed a wooden roller on the machine and stapled the cloth to it. He again hit the feed button and the roller, with its pin and spring ends inserted into stays at either end of the width of the cloth, spun, pulling a premeasured length of material onto itself. Ralph stepped on the bar that ran along the floor, this sent a razor screaming across the cloth, cutting the distance between one shade and the next. He then hit the button once more, this cleared the completed shade and fed six inches of cloth for the next. A 37 1/2" x 58" salmon colored, fire proof, window shade had been made.

He rolled the completed shade in his hands, tightening it, and then placed it into a V-truck at his side. He inhaled, looked around and saw the other operators filling their V-trucks and he felt good.

The combined noises of the Auroras meshed to sound like a big machine. Ralph listened to the cycle of noises: the staple guns rivetting metal through cloth into wood, the jump and chugging of the rollers pulling the cloth up through to the shade rollers; the razor ripping through the cloth and the sound of steam emissions each time that happened, that sound reminded Ralph of tailors pressing pants.

John had his regular radio station on and the day was kicking into gear. It was easy listening music, the kind that Ralph’s wife, Vicki, called music.

Ralph thought how those musicians had life easy. As he listened to the woodwind and violin sections make their melodic leads in a version of Elenor Rigby, he pictured the musicians attending the recording sessions at total ease with one another.

He thought of himself in that pleasant situation. He wouldn’t mind being a part of such a well organized operation as he pictured the easy listening music business was. He saw himself living a leisurely existence, having tuna sandwiches with Vicki and tipping a glass of apple juice to his daughter Linda’s lips.

Over his head, on the fourth floor of the old riverfront plant, was the Shipping Department. The long center aisle that went from the elevator to the clerk’s office was covered by a steel plate to protect the wooden floor from the various product transport vehicles that went that route daily.

He heard someone slamming the heavy elevator doors and taking a load of shades down to the clerk. He could tell it was a V-truck with a small order of shades. The wheels of the V-truck hit the plate and as it passed over head, first sounding faint, then loud, then fading off faintly again, it sounded to Ralph just like the jets that passed overhead at the local fourth of July parade. He could tell that it wasn’t a heavier vehicle, such as a tow-motor, etc., because their weight made the floor crack and when they rolled over the plate they sounded like thunder. Ralph thought of the jets flying over cities. He thought of the shades in their boxes and the missiles inside the jets. The sound faded but he kept pondering the jets.

He started to think about the current world situation as he continued to produce shades. He turned around at the sound of his foreman’s voice. He was just getting off of the elevator and was talking to the ladies who were sewing wooden slats into the shades, punching eyelets into them and putting that into plastic bags and then into cardboard boxes. He had a newspaper under his arm.

Ralph studied the paper and could tell it had already been read. It was folded and crumpled as if some pages didn’t fold easily at their creases. He had been bringing a paper to work for the past few weeks, Ralph thought, but he never read it in front of anyone. Ralph thought he was like everyone else who either hid their real feelings about the world situation or else was unaffected by it. No one ever seemed to talk about it. Perhaps, he thought, the foreman was instructed by Management not to get the workers thinking about it. He watched the foreman and tried to figure it out.

For a moment, Ralph’s eyes met the foreman’s and he nodded with a raised brow, asking if Ralph had a problem. Ralph, caught staring, shook his head and returned to his Aurora. Then he got the feeling that everyone in the plant had talked about the situation with everyone else but him. Momentarily, he felt alienated.

Ralph threaded new cloth through his machine and continued to make shades. He looked up and watched John operate steadfastly. John, a conservative in most matters and personal applications, had once told Ralph the secret to happiness was to grow old with grace. Ralph observed John’s mannerisms and thought the greying, quiet gentleman was indeed very graceful.

"Ya just gotta find a way ta fit in and then go with that," he heard John’s voice in his head. John would give him these pieces of advice with out breaking a stride in his system of movements as he made shades.

"Yes, I guess so," Ralph would say.

Thinking of his conversations with John calmed Ralph. He hadn’t quite gotten up the nerve to open himself up with John and ask his opinion of the world chaos. But what little allusions towards that subject Ralph had made were always dealt with a controlled calmness by John.

But that upset Ralph as he began to question John’s sincerity. Perhaps, he thought, Management had also told John not to get Ralph any more excited than he already was. He thought John could be harboring a true fear of the world situation and not really committing himself honestly.

He began to set a pace and make shades steadily. He thought about what John had said regarding growing old gracefully and finding a place to fit in and a warm feeling came to the pit of his stomach. He watched John put a shade into his V-truck and continue with another shade thereafter: John was honest, he thought, he must be, if he wasn’t he couldn’t be the way he is; a graceful man who did follow his own advice, a man who was going with what he had.

Then it came to Ralph that the entire world was a machine. He liked his part in it. He thought of Vicki and Linda, his pay, the rewards of fun times for
Vicki had just finished breastfeeding Linda. They both slept on the bed. Ralph turned up the small space heater and threw a quilt over them. The child was in between two pillows and that made Ralph feel at ease; he didn’t want to risk waking her by having to move her to the crib.

He left then and went to the middle room of the upstairs apartment. He sat on the floor and looked down at the chicken salad sandwich and carrot sticks that Vicki had prepared for him. He hadn’t eaten all day because of his shaken state. No one at work had made any mention of the news and he was afraid to read the paper.

He turned on the TV, it was the only light in the room; it cast his shadow on the bare pink wall behind him. They were without furniture for a few weeks; they had sold their couch and two chairs to friends of theirs and were waiting until Ralph got two more pay checks so they could buy the new ones, paying in cash. Ralph liked to pay in cash whenever he bought anything. He hated to owe anyone.

He put the food on the floor and waited for the Network News. The world was in turmoil and he was nearly afraid to watch.

A large man, over six feet tall, two hundred and fifty pounds, Ralph Zarobowski never worried about his own personal existence. He had never feared his life like this before.

He loved life and playing his part in it. When he did something little like change a razor on the Aurora, at times he’d drop one of the screws that held the blade in place. Searching for the screw among the pieces of trim or waste cloth was like reaching for a grasshopper’s legs in between the stalks of high grass in the fields near his house when he was young. Having these memories come back to him during the day once in a while was pleasing.

He loved Vicki, their new baby which had brought them even closer; the music they’d listen to with the TV sound off, the part of father that he had recently acquired; he dreaded not being able to do his part.

He felt very much a part of the Mounting Department as well. He liked to hear the older operators like Little Irish or Billy Dambella, Irish’s side kick, tell their stories of the days when the entire third floor was Aurora’s and they made special satins shades for Pullman railroad cars or about the time Little Irish was elected to make the one shade that Venus II took to the moon.

He thought about how he stayed in the bathroom each morning and wished their department could have coffee each day like the others. He wondered if the others thought he was rude for staying in there. There was an amiable comradeship between them all and he felt that slipping through his stomach.

He felt scared as well as ridiculous: this couldn’t be happening, he demanded to himself.

There was even an amiable quality to his distant foreman. Ralph never expressed the near violent hatred the other operators did toward the man. They called him “foreskin” and were all convinced that he was either insane or very mean. Then Ralph thought he did hate the foreman: the only time he came near him was to correct him or take his machine over to relieve Ralph for a break.

When Ralph first met him, he claimed that the production of window shades was indicative of American growth: “America needs buildings,” he’d say, “Buildings mean growth and every building has windows and they in turn need shades.” Ralph saw the foreman’s face in his mind, his mouth grotesque somehow, like a person chewing a mouthful of food with their mouth open.

After the foreman had said that, John came by Ralph’s Aurora and said, “Don’t pay him a never mind son, he’s from a friggin’ military academy, he don’ know nothin’ about shades is all. He’s a dink; he thinks that kinda shit’s gonna stir us up or somethin’. You get hung up or ya got any questions, ya come see me.”

The foreman was a fool, Ralph thought.

He shook these thoughts for a minute and sat up to watch the screen as the news began. He pushed his plate of food away; it sat in a pool of white light that spilled out over Ralph’s knees and up to his thinning waist.

The first aspect he noticed was the frantic and exhausted expression of the anchorman’s face. He looked very upset and seemed to be attempting to compose himself. The Network logo was superimposed over the newscaster’s face as some credits rolled. It was a picture of the world. Ralph saw it explode in his mind.

The news was that Russia had threatened to invade Israel and that the United States of Europe had committed itself as Israel’s ally. The news flowed out of the man’s mouth and upon its completion, he seemed to be breathless.

Ralph turned off the TV and reclined on the floor. He felt dizzy. He thought because of his lack of both food and sleep that he might’ve been seeing things.

He was wearing a white t-shirt and boxing shorts, they made him look pale in the blackness. In the darkness he heard the sounds of Vicki and Linda breathing. He felt thin, as if he could be pulled out of his clothes. Then he pictured men picking him up, his limp body hanging in their grasp. In his head Vicki wept and Linda was too young to understand why the enemy had shot him. Men stood along the periphery of his vision in long black coats with emblems on their sleeves. They were tall men with black eyes that were lashless like rats and hands that were powerful and cold like giant sea crabs. He heard his wife sigh. He wept for a moment, tasting his own salt. Then he sat back up and turned the TV on again.

There was a peanut butter commercial on that was an old rerun. It showed George Washington crossing the Delaware with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in his hands, eating it and pointing the way with it. Then it showed the four men who raised the flag on Iwo Jima eating peanut butter out of ration cans. The narrator then claimed: “If they had a part in history, they ate Peanut butter, you should too!”

Ralph felt a terrible wrong had been done by whoever gave the go ahead to put that commercial on at a time like this. He remembered how funny it was...
when it first came out. He saw himself on the back porch of his mother's house drinking lemonade back in July when Vicki was still pregnant with Linda. But now it was perverse. Then he thought that the people at the network were trying to humor a troubled nation or that they had all gone insane.

He imagined a conversation with John:

"The world's coming to an end."

"Oh don't worry." In his head, John turned to him and spoke out of a hooded cloak. He was all bones. "Age gracefully," he said. All the people in the plant were inside these cloaks and were in a picture, a group shot, that the enemy had passed around as an example of cooperative people.

Ralph shut off the TV and stumbled into his kitchen. Under the counter was a cabinet with a bottle of bourbon. He poured a juice glass half way and drank it down, gulping hard and breathing like a man nearly drowned. He swallowed again and stared into the black emptiness that surrounded him. He finished the glass and felt it burn inside his stomach. He pulled off the bottle and smelled its own breath. He was dizzy and thought he'd never catch his breath like a child who has had a school yard bully punch his stomach, he felt the twisting knot of his body fall to the ground and the fear ripple through his heartbeat. He wept and tried to swallow but there was nothing in his mouth. He let the glass fall into the sink and collapsed on the floor. His arms wrapped around his shoulders and he couldn't hold himself tight enough. His cries sounded like the moans of a wounded man. He felt the world falling apart and knew no one was trying to prevent it.

He imagined a conversation with John:

"Yea, " Ralph admitted.

"Well so aren't they," his voice was smooth and explanatory, "They're all scared too, all a 'em, so nothin'll happen, don't fret son."

That made a lot of sense to Ralph and it calmed him some also. He returned to his Aurora and began to give Vicki imaginary instructions on how to operate it and how to thread the cloth through it. He liked to pretend that he was with him when he worked. He set a comfortable pace and shades rolled off his machine. Just as he showed Vicki how to set the yarder for a premeasured length of material, the foreman came to relieve him for his break.

Ralph walked down to the elevator. He wanted to go down to the first floor cafeteria and get something into his stomach. He felt pretty sick and knew he should eat.

He pressed the button that would bring the elevator up to his floor. He looked through the window and watched as the light of the rising elevator filled the shaft. When it leveled off at the third floor, he was giving imaginary instructions to his wife who held Linda in tight wraps. He was telling her to hurry and they were both pleading with the child to stop crying. The enemy was right behind them and stalking. They were Nazis. These were the ones he was most familiar with, the most evil on the TV; the ones most impressed into his mind during his life.

Ralph stepped off the elevator on the first floor and waved hello to Squash, the head of Plant Maintenance. He was a barrel-chested, short man who was always smiling. Nothing upset him, not even dropping a hundred dollars to Romeo on the Superbowl. He once told Ralph that on his last day of work he was going to rip up all the time cards by the punch clock. Squash was himself, smiling, meandering around, looking things over.

When Ralph got to the cafeteria he saw his friend Danny, from Recieving. The two exchanged handshakes. Ralph was projecting himself to eating a pastry from behind the vending machine glass. He ran his fingers through his green work pants pockets and felt the change bouncing around. He pumped two quarters into the machine. He pulled the handle and it was a successful escape for his family; they were all safe at Danny's home and were about to sit down to a warm meal.

The two of them talked about taking their wives out again soon. They had such a good time at New Year's Eve, partying around town. Ralph ate some cup cakes, drank a cup of coffee and had a smoke.

He returned to the third floor. Vicki and Linda were there also. He stepped off of the elevator and the crowd began to cheer. This was the final event of his imaginary competition. He heard the commentator's in his mind: "Oh yea folks, you can hear the crowd's reaction right there, this Ralph Zaranbowski's a favorite with them. He's a real pro at that Aurora. It's gonna be hard for the Russian to pull out the sixty points he'll need for a victory. Whata ya think, Jack?"

"Oh, yes. That's exactly right. Stan. Ya know this whole competition has been back and forth, anything can happen, but one thing's for sure, Stan, this Zaranbowski is the best the Americans can send into the final."

He began to make shades feverishly. The competition had suddenly escalated to a battle for world peace. He pictured his mother with her thin fingers wrapped around a string of Rosary beads; he saw his father chewing a cigar and slugging down a shot of vodka to ease the outcome: they were in a dark room, were silent and then his mother broke down.

The Russian began to beat him. Then Ralph thought of Vicki and Linda. He heard Vicki screaming as she was being burnt to death. His eyes grew hot with tears, but he could run the machine blindfolded.

The Russian had made a mistake and cloth spun out of his Aurora faster and faster causing him to have several yards of waste. He had to stop to fix his mistake and Ralph built an unsurmountable lead. But to insure victory, Ralph broke into a steadfast race which accelerated slowly so efficiency wasn't sacrificed. It was hopeless now for the Russian who was simply too far behind. And Ralph paused to hear the people cheer as they stood in the streets of the world surrounding the newly raised buildings in his mind.

S. J. Murabito
The Telling

Home. Not to decorate unswept, unlit corners, but to tell him what I’ve seen and been: How winter corpses hang, late seeds gone bearded refusing flight or fall. How stripped torn branches wave the slow canal with crooked dignity. How water is turned green mud. How ruined choirs etch the long bare face where nothing hungry swallows the stonesplash ghost of August frog.

Home. He kissed my dry lips. I dropped my offering of weeds, random on the table—his eyes not following.

My words lit slowly, early fireflies in a wooded lot, then flickering swarmed and burned. He saw how I was touched, how seasons change.

and he fell away.

Suzanne Shane

Six Tenant Farmers Without Farms, Hardman County, Texas. 1938

Dust

and a good wind will move mountains.

But these are not mountains, only men. Each stands with his own hat in his own pose, and each stares into the blind eye of the camera with almost the indifference with which the blind sun stares. Their lives have come to this. What moves on the horizon no longer moves them. Like the dust storm’s gray aftermath, they are a stunned stillness where the wind has been.

A dust storm begins with a single gray particle, dislodged into wind and looking for home. All heat and hunger, it owns nothing and so has nothing to give. What stands in the wind it demolishes. What it has picked clean it leaves for the living.

Mike Jennings
Oswego 1944-1947

Beyond the grime the deserted rotting downtown building just off bridge street the well lit motel sloping toward the blackened waters the sky its northern stars cold and far immutable years somebody else was there along the lake did i ever touch its face
the ebb of canada chilled glassiness east and west flows lifetimes wet snow and the river canal unused alongside the highways on either side toward southern cities stale doughnuts and the pontiac hotel seedy its glory gone landscapes run from the center of town apple orchards farms geometric factories leave the hub of my past i would not know reality if there were no names the old homes close together always winter barely spring a relic of streets cayuga seneca ontario dead titles crisscross into nonentity the bars solid consistent permanent there is no past half assed buddhist seer say this barbara twenty three small breasted on the lake shore near the match factory until the quiet before morning say i've not been there or give me joy for life or give me cause

Roy Schoenberg
Andy Capp

Did Flo come to you on a sweet
Honey night, bring you a beer, brush
Your cap over your brow and lie
Down beside you, stroke your young chest
And sing love songs into your eyes?

Has Flo ever seen your round eyes?

Do you stare into the palms orange
Of flame lapping light into morning
And draw another day’s smoke down
Til the ashstick hangs from your lips?

Or are the shadows you wake to
Only your feet before your shoes:
Another day waiting for Flo,
An exchange, some archway sarcasm;
And once in a while, at the pub,
A gleam from underneath your cap?

S. J. Murabito

Dagwood Bumstead

I wouldn’t want to be that stupid
Or have a wife resigned to stand by the door
With my children in a line as straight
As an apron that never knew a stain.

I wouldn’t want to be thrown from businessman
To frustrated businessman, never having time
To realize that my ineptitude was the gasoline
Of everyone’s trip to the funhouse, everyone’s humiliation.

I wouldn’t want to live in that magnificent stupor
Of dizzy language and dogbone-nudged-at-foot sentimentality
Never realizing the reason for Communist befriending of late
Was that if I actualized my potential Capitalism would sink.

I would, however, just once, love to realize my tardiness
And slop jam, jelly, egg, salt and pepper on my toast;
Kiss the wife and kids good-bye as I shoved it down my face,
Crawl over the remains of the breakfast table, charge blindly

Out the door and send the United States Mail into flight.

S. S. Murabito
Trace's

Imaging
There are dreams I dream at night,
You are a morning dream.
Sometimes I wait all night
To go to sleep again.
The rays contain your presence.
Is it the sun or is it you?
I imagine it is both.
Miles away a solar plate
Circling the heavens.

Memoring
This is no mistake,
You being here again
To wake me from my sleep,
My years of sleep,
My years of night.
There was no flash.
Dawn slightly breaking
Subtle light.
The mooring of the morning.

Evering
More than light and darkness,
You are a feeling.
Save, preserve, nourish a sense
With your presence.
Turn away?
"Maybe next time."
There won't be one.
You are evering.

Steve Geary