

SOLZHENITSYN JUKEBOX

Ann Bogle

Argotist Ebooks

Cover image by Rachel Lisi

Copyright © Ann Bogle 2010
All rights reserved
Argotist Ebooks

SOLZHENITSYN JUKEBOX

Contents

Dumb Luck	6
Fiancée	18
Car Talk	20
Solzhenitsyn Jukebox	22
Hoss Men	24

Dumb Luck

Radio

It is a long morning that begins with a hymn on the radio. She turns in her sleep, roused awake by the singer's training.

Her boss calls during lunch hour



To a pedestrian crossing at 14th Street: “Am I facing uptown or downtown?” “Up,” the pedestrian says stopping. Directions and hybrids blur in the mind while rotating. Apple stand, mint, wheat grass juice, rutabaga, tie-dyeds. Amish wagon to the curb. Sunshine breaks an egg over Phillips Ambulatory. Tall—for walking—espresso on ice. Lunch crowd milling. 9.8 per cent out of work. Telephone snapshot of flower stand. Telephone rings: Señor Carlisle.

“Hello,” Señorita Mill pretends not to know.

“Hell-o-ah,” he mocks her.

“Stop,” she says and corrects: “Hell-o.”

“Where are you?”

“Union Square.”

“Is it raining?”

“Sunny.”

“Pick up a *Post* and a pair of green apples.”

Miss widow



Mill takes her assignment and heads with it toward Broadway to walk past the windows of discount shoes. She thinks Carlisle lives in the Shoe Box District, but she hasn't said it. She asked for leave to visit a club in the Meat Packing District, and Carlisle said he'd send her to the Diamond District if she wasn't careful. She imagined riding the subway alone to the Diamond District to size her engagement ring, but nothing came of it besides banter about the burden of money. “The Statue of Liberty is the color of money,” he told her on a Saturday. Apples at the Farmers' Market are the color of dairy barns

not *green*. Carlisle means “Granny Smiths” from New Zealand.

Mill picks the firmest green apples from the bin at Modern Gourmet. The deli is out of the *Post*, so she buys Raisin Bran as a joke at her expense. The shopkeepers are not fluent in the vocabulary of groceries: Motrin for margarine. All the service workers are fluent in the ways to pay. Currency is universal. The owner’s wife takes her dollars and returns her change. Mill puts the coins in her pocket to give to the man outside.

A new pair of glasses



“Miss Mill,” Umberto greets her when she gets to Carlisle’s building.

She lifts the bag of groceries over the counter. “Good noon, Umberto. This is for Mr. Carlisle.”

“You’re not going up?”

“I have rounds,” she says.

“What do I tell him?”

“That I have rounds.”

Umberto stares at her hopefully.

“Errands,” she says.

“Work for Mr. Carlisle?”

“Yes,” she says.

“I’ll tell him. Good afternoon, Miss Mill.”

“Goodbye, Umberto.”

Mill passes Il Cantinori on her way to University Place. Its French doors are open, and lunchers sit at tables half inside, half outside, sipping wine and eating dull bread.

At Devonshire Optical, the bell klingels as she opens the door. She fishes in her red wallet for her prescription. She wants green frames. She peers through the cases. There is one green pair. The clerk lets her try them on, but they do not suit her face. She sees a light brown pair.

“These,” she says to the clerk. The clerk sits with her at a fitting table to take adjustments then writes her name and address and telephone number on an index card.

“We’ll call when they’re ready,” the clerk says.

“I’ll wear these until then,” Mill says. Mill paid \$3 on Minnesota Care for the wire pair. In Minnesota, she wears them for driving and at the theater. In the city, she wears them to see to the end of the block and discern faces on *Law & Order*. When Carlisle saw them, he told her to get new ones.

At the drugstore



Mill puts the receipt for the glasses in her wallet and leaves the store, bell klingeling. She crosses the street to Whitney Chemists. The bell rings.

She fishes in her wallet for Carlisle's prescription.

"Ten minutes," the pharmacist tells her.

"I'll wait," Mill says and sits in the solitary chair.

She fishes in her satchel for a plain white envelope, a pen, and a roll of stamps. She writes Carlisle's address on the envelope and puts the receipt for her glasses in it: \$386.

"Here it is," the pharmacist tells her. "\$127."

"Do you have his insurance card?" Mill says.

"Viagra isn't covered. We called."

Mill gives the pharmacist her credit card, signs, then tucks the receipt in the mailer.

When she gets to Carlisle's building, she gives Umberto the packet from Whitney Chemists.

"Thanks, Umberto."

"You're welcome, Miss Mill. Still working?"

"Still working," she says.

Mill drops the envelope in the mailbox at Broadway then walks the three blocks home.

In for the night



The telephone rings: Señor Carlisle.

"Hello," Señorita Mill pretends not to know.

"Where are you?" Carlisle says.

"At home," Mill tells him.

"What are you wearing?"

Mill is silent.

"What are you wearing?" Carlisle asks again.

"A skirt!" Mill says.

"The skirt I bought you?" Carlisle says.

"A skirt my mother gave me," Mill says, "and a lightweight cardigan."

"The brown skirt?" Carlisle says.

"It's beige," she tells him.

"What are your plans?"

"I have no plans," Mill says.

"You're in for the night?" Carlisle insists.

"I'm in for the night," she says.

"You're safe?" he asks.

"Perfectly," she says.

"This is New York City," he reminds her.

"I'm safe in my apartment," she says.

"Your door is locked?"

“Yes,” she says.

“You have plenty of food? What are you having for dinner?”

“Sandwiches,” she says.

“What kind of sandwich?”

“Grilled cheese with salad,” she says.

“And you have shopped?”

“Yes,” she says.

“Umberto said you came in twice this afternoon—that you were ‘working.’ I said that unless you were in the upstairs room that you were bamboozling him. He didn’t know the word ‘bamboozle.’ ”

“I’ll explain last weekend’s overtime then,” she says.

“Define bamboozle,” Carlisle says.

“Gyp,” Mill says.

“Look it up,” Carlisle says. “Read it to me.”

Mill goes to her computer. “1. cheat somebody: to trick or deceive somebody through misleading statements or falsehoods. 2. perplex somebody: to make somebody confused.”

“I bamboozled Umberto,” Carlisle proffers.

“Yes,” she says.

He can read her thoughts



Mill knits Carlisle a pullover evenings. The pullover is dark brown with a beige v- at the neck and stripe at the cuff. Carlisle does not deserve a pullover. Carlisle deserves a lump in the head for his incessant phone calls and demands. A man ought to buy his own newspaper, she thinks, ought to buy his aunt a birthday card. He ought to move his *chaise longue* and see to it when he needs towels. Carlisle hired her to keep books, yet the labor is indivisible. She feels indentured, not like a service worker. The service workers have position and pride. She has no pride. She has little pride. Carlisle’s idea of service would shape a Founding Father. Smoke rises from her tender temple. She puts on water for tea.

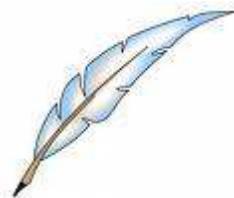
“Miss Mill,” Carlisle begins when she answers the phone.

“Yes,” Mill says. She wraps the teapot in a crisp dishcloth.

“Your service is unimpeachable,” he says.

“It’s nothing,” Mill says. He can read her thoughts after hours when all the shops are closed. He can read her thoughts at a distance of city blocks. He can read her thoughts over the din of books on the bedside table. He can read thoughts she filters with J. S. Bach.

Cognates in the *Post*



In the morning Mill arrives at Carlisle's suite with *Post* in hand. The *Post* lies ravaged on the empty desk. Her chair is parked in the center of the room, wheels askew. (She leaves it neatly positioned under her desk with its wheels pointed toward the wall.) The spare chair is in its usual position tucked under the empty desk. She inclines it toward her desk then straightens the wheels of her chair by sliding it along the lines in the Persian rug and sits.

The telephone rings: Señor Carlisle.

"Hello," Señorita Mill pretends not to know.

"See page 7," he says.

Mill opens the clean copy of the *Post* to page 7. "Baseball topper," she reads, "tests plus for 'roids."

"'Zat one 'roid or two?" Carlisle says.

"The article doesn't go into it," Mill says.

"Spell hemorrhoid," Carlisle says.

"H-e-m-m," Mill says.

"Look it up," he says.

Mill wakes the computer. "H-e-m-o-r-r-h-o-i-d," she says.

"Baseball topper's 'hoids test-us," Carlisle proffers.

"Calumny," Mill says, flanking her hair.

Carlisle is silent.

"I hired you to follow stock reports," he says. "I keep you because you know the word 'calumny.' Read the definition."

Mill toggles the mouse, "1. defamation: the making of false statements about somebody with malicious intent. 2. defamatory statement: a slanderous statement or false accusation.

"15th century. From Latin *calumnia* or false accusation (also the source of English *challenge*), from *calvi* 'to deceive.'"

Talk of the weather



The rain changes the shapes of trees. It changes the buildings, though not, she thinks, *this* building. This building stays dry and firm. Mill takes out her magnifying glass and begins to harvest statistics.

The telephone rings: Carlisle.

"Hello," Mill says.

"You want to know how bad it is?" he says.

"It doesn't look all bad," she says.

"It's a black cloud over a picnic before it rains. It's a jammed pistol. It's a dictionary with half the letters removed."

"It's a tornado that hits your barn not your house," Mill says as he hangs up.

Koan



Mill pans the indices for gold. “One ’roid or two?” plays in her mind like a strain from a musical. *Couple of street paranoids*, it says. “Zat one ’noid or two?” she rehearses. “When ’noids talk, money listens.”

One male ape to another: “Is that a butt or a breastplate through the trees?”

The phone rings: Carlisle.

“What is O-I-D?” Mill says.

“Oxford Indiana Dictionary,” he says.

“The suffix is from Greek,” Mill says, “and means ‘like, resembling, or related to’ from *eidōs*: form or shape.”

“Original Issue Discount,” he says, “or H-O-T.”

“What’s H-O-T?” she says.

“You,” he says. “It’s Hell on Taxes.”

“A porn koan,” she says.

“Hah!” he says.

The goose escapes the glass.

Time tells her



Mill attended the University of Minnesota in the 1980s. She majored in English. One of her friends from childhood, Nancy O’Reilly, acted as if she had outgrown Mill by college. Mill saw Nancy O’Reilly days in Coffman Union reading psycholinguistics textbooks. Mill sat tables away reading Donne or Pope or Dryden or Swift but not the Romantics. Mill knew her own heart too little, the result of having a formal mother. If Nancy O’Reilly had stayed her friend, if their intellects had banded together, Mill might have realized she wanted a career in banking.

Had she realized she wanted a career in banking, she might have met her husband. Had she met her husband, she might have had children. Mill became an office worker with progressive responsibilities and static paycheck, and Nancy O’Reilly went on to earn a Ph.D. in linguistics. Mrs. Mill got a thank you note from Mrs. O’Reilly after Nancy O’Reilly had become Nancy O’Reilly-Kemp, though Nancy O’Reilly hadn’t invited Mill to the wedding. Later Mrs. Mill learned from Mrs. O’Reilly at the grocery store the O’Reilly-Kemps had two children.

Mill wrote, “Bookkeeping is to the Romantics as Teheran is to Carter,” and sent it to Carlisle’s blind box ad.

Interview



It was Mill's dumb luck that Carlisle's favorite president was Jimmy Carter. At least, that's what he said when he phoned her mother's house in Wayzata. That and his mother had grown up in St. Paul.

His mother's father had given him a dictionary that had belonged to Mark Twain. The dictionary was signed by Twain and lying in a safety deposit box in Connecticut. Carlisle had read it in its entirety the summer after boarding school.

Carlisle told her he was glad that a Minnesota gal had answered the ad, and, "not just any farm-fed," he said, "but a gal with English and a little economics under her belt."

"We belong together," he said that first phone call, "as John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle."

"I read an article about their fire in *The New Yorker*," Mill acknowledged.

"*The New Yorker* delivers out in Wayzata?" Carlisle said.

"Their subscription center is in Red Oak, Iowa," Mill said.

"Boone," Carlisle corrected her.

As a child, another child had called Mill "Little Miss Know-It-All" and "nigger lips" on the same day. That child was a woman by then, a divorcing and foreclosed woman with two children and a married black lover.

He heralds newsworthy deaths



Telephone rings: Carlisle.

"Hello," Mill pretends not to know.

"Are you sitting down?" Carlisle asks.

"I'm pacing," she says.

"Why do you pace so much?" he asks.

"It's exercise," she says.

"It's a lunatic asylum in there," he says. Mill's ancestors were more stable than Carlisle's.

"The market is down," he says, but that's not why he's calling. "Are you sitting down?" Then, as is his custom, Carlisle reads the *Times* obituaries page to her.

"It's curtains for Curtin," he summarizes before reading the text. "Scholar of the slave trade dead at 87."

"Bogle bit it," he says.

"Founder of Vanguard?" Mill asks.

"Bob of the Ventures," he says. "You're too young to remember *Hawaii Five-0*."

"I am not!" Mill protests foolishly, tired of hearing him say she is too young to remember things. "I washed dishes to it."

Mill learns more about life from Carlisle's daily slog through the obituaries than she likes to admit. She pretends to an estranged discomfort at the thought or mention of death—shudders on cue at it—but she is in fact glad that people die: and not only people but all living things. Mortality is the universal sign that democracy exists outside its documents, that it has a natural basis, she thinks.

A motto for love



Before Mill moved to New York to work for Carlisle, she lived with her mother to spare expenses. One night Mill asked idly over supper what love is, not believing her mother would know.

Her mother said, “Many people live without it.”

Mrs. Mill did not seem to wonder about love after Mr. Mill had died nor during forty years of practical marriage. Yet Mrs. Mill knew enough, perhaps all there was to know about love.

Mill set her heart on living with it.

Under the hood



Mill lives graciously without love in the 00s. A student of modernism, the 80s were her 20s, the 90s her 30s, the aunts her 40s.

Her lifetime is an odometer reset to zero. She is a car parked at auction, an antique or classic, not a dragster. She is a beauty restored to a season, not a hot virgin or spinster, but an old maid with a lesbian's timing. Bidders ignore her or come in low.

There was an ice storm not a hurricane when she lived in Texas.

Men gently used her to make love without commitment in her 20s. In her 30s, the men were more vigorous, and she once called the police, believing police were the bureau to care. The policemen stood at her apartment door with sheepish blue eyes and bulges at the hip. She hoped no one would fire a gun. One of the officers said, “Let sleeping dogs lie,” while the man most presumed innocent by the jury said, “Don't lie to the officers.” Mill thanked them. The next day she resigned her job and packed suitcases and boxes for Minnesota. The men were all cowards, Mrs. Mill said, and, “Justice has been served.”

La discrimination positive



Mill sits down when Carlisle calls to ask why she isn't married.

"Rig-a-marole," she says.

"It's heating up," Carlisle says. "Look it up."

"It's an alternate spelling," Mill says, feeling apologetic for her one-more syllable, as when she says real-a-tor and Viag-a-ra. "I saw Niagara when I was three," she says.

"Three is too young," Carlisle says.

"I was in high school when the Equal Rights Amendment didn't pass—the Supreme Court said then that women are 'people' under the Constitution—a lot of people were listening," Mill says. "I thought it meant I would become an 'adult person' not a 'woman.' All we got was 'privacy' amid street protests and religious cantilevering over abortion."

"We are all people of color," Carlisle says.

"Some people are slower of color than others," Mill says.

Wildlife



She speaks to her mother on Tuesdays, but today her mother is in Eau Claire with her garden journey group.

Her mother knows that Mill has met Carlisle in person, but certain others in Minnesota suspect that she has never even seen him. They quiz her during return trips on his appearance: Is he tall, broad, handsome, good-natured, good-looking, older, younger, available?

"He's my boss," she says, or "he is he," when cornered.

Carlisle asks for discretion in relating details of her position to anyone except her mother, whom he has judged (without meeting) to be of the older generation, from the set who survived the Great Depression and World Wars, who preserves homegrown tomatoes, who is old school. Mrs. Mill is all that, and she is also a *modern*.

Mill misses the wildlife of her home in Wayzata: the rabbits at the birdfeeder, the deer in the woods, the gardens and wild leeks. She misses the moths and butterflies, the frogs that climb and toads that crawl. She misses Tilly Artaud, an American toad who sat at Mill's glass door every midnight for a summer, as if she had swallowed a Timex watch battery. She misses her cat, The Doctor: his bushy gray tail and Roman nose, his pacing the hallways at night as if carrying transcripts of her speeches to Congress.

Carlisle has urged her to get a dog to walk in the morning. If she gets a dog, his name will be "Johannes." If she doesn't get one, she'll consider a bird.

Truck



Mill rolls her chair under the desk and turns out the light.

The phone rings: Carlisle.

Mill answers in the dusk.

“I talked to your mother,” Carlisle says.

“She’s in Eau Claire,” Mill says, not bothering to turn on the light.

“She’s back,” Carlisle says. “I asked her why you left Texas, and she said, ‘Truck.’”

“She’s flirting with you,” Mill says. “I told you she is a modern.”

“What is ‘truck’ in her lexicon?” Carlisle says.

Mill turns on the light and nudges the mouse. “‘Keep on trucking’,” Mill says, “‘to carry on with work or life in a cheerful and relaxed way, in spite of problems (informal).’”

“Your mother is a contemporary of Jerry Garcia, Robert Hunter, and The Grateful Dead,” Carlisle says.

“Truck that hauls or carries,” Mill says.

“I get the idea you didn’t ‘fall off the turnip truck,’” Carlisle says. “Or the ‘Swedish carrot’ truck to be German about it,” he adds, referring to last week’s discussion of “rutabaga.”

“‘Truck’ is archaic for barter,” Mill says. “That is probably the sense she means.”

“What sort of truck was it in Texas?” Carlisle says.

“Small as truck goes,” Mill says. “Smaller than a full-size pick-up.”

“If full-size pick-up means you killed someone?” Carlisle says.

“No, if eighteen-wheeler means someone else did,” Mill says. “It wasn’t my truck.”

“Whose truck was it?”

“Dean’s,” Mill says.

“Go on,” Carlisle says.

“Dean is my former boyfriend,” Mill says.

“Dean is his last name?” Carlisle says.

“Dean is his middle name,” Mill says.

“Did he hurt you?” Carlisle asks.

“If by hurt, you mean dismayed, disappointed, or chagrined, yes,” Mill says.

“I mean *hit*,” Carlisle says. “Did he hit you?”

“He hit the wall next to my bed,” Mill says.

“Are you still in love with him?” Carlisle says.

“It was last century,” Mill says. “I’m in love with The Doctor as I told you.”

“Whose doctor?” Carlisle says. “Your doctor?”

“The Doctor,” Mill says, “my cat.”

Dual citizens



The phone rings: Carlisle.
 “Good evening,” Mill says.
 “Where are you?” he says.
 “At home,” she says.
 “Are you in for the night?” he says.
 “Yes,” she says.
 “Have you thought about the coming year twenty-ten?” Carlisle says.
 “Is twenty-ten what we’ll call it?” Mill says.
 “Your voice sounds sexy when you’re sleepy,” he says. “Look it up.”
 “It isn’t in the dictionary,” she says after a pause. “It was a science fiction novel and film. The census is next year and the winter Olympics in Vancouver.”
 “Twenty-ten will be a good year,” he says.
 “Everyone is hoping,” she says. “People say this was a bad decade due to the War.”
 “Obama won,” Carlisle says.
 “Yes,” she says, “Obama will be President in twenty-ten.”
 “Miss Mill will be Mrs. Carlisle,” he says.
 “You borrow trouble,” she says.
 “I eschew borrowing,” he says. “It’s a fair topic.”
 “We’re not equal,” she says.
 “Look it up,” he says.
 “Es-choo,” she says, “sounds like a sneeze. I prefer es-skew, but it isn’t listed. It comes from old German meaning shy.”
 “We are equal under the law,” he says.
 “Equal in legal contexts,” she says. “Otherwise it means identical.”
 “You’re sure?” he says.
 “That is what it says right here,” she says.
 “I thought I would call my lawyer,” he says. “You call your lawyer, and we’ll sit down and hash it out and come up with a prudent agreement.”
 “I never wanted a big church wedding,” Mill says. “I lost my belief in God early. It was like losing my virginity by falling off a bike or horse. I lost connection with God when I hit the ground. I got back on the bike or horse and rode away, but I was godless.”
 “Religion is the source of true fiction,” he says.
 “I feel like a mail-order bride from Canada,” she says.

Denouement



She imagines Carlisle in a wheelchair. One of her friends in Minnesota said, “Is he in a wheelchair? Is that why you aren’t talking? Is he old and in a wheel chair?”

Mill imagines him in a wheelchair; she imagines him standing miraculously to touch her hair. She imagines him old and miraculously turning fifty. She imagines the denouement.

“Come up and see me sometime,” she drawls. “Is that a pistol in your pants or are you just happy to

see me?"

When the doorman rings, Mill remembers Carlisle can read her thoughts. "Let him up," Mill says. She is wearing an African kaftan and briefs and a bra under it. She is glad her legs are waxed, her hair and nails are fresh. She slips on flat sandals and pulls a brush through her hair. She douses herself with Dior, leaves the door ajar, and waits.

Carlisle steps inside the apartment as if he were there to build it, mysteriously raising his foot as if clearing a stone fence. He is wearing a black suit and hat.

Mill blushes as if she has nothing to hide.

"Come here," Carlisle says. He locks his fingers behind her neck and pulls her to his mouth. They fall into a bookshelf. "You're not getting out of this."

"I quit my job," she mumbles.

"You quit your job in twenty-ten," he tells her.

Fiancée

*The willing suspension of disbelief, a parakeet.
You cook then leave dishes for the reader.
I prevent having dishes to wash by not cooking.
I eat nuts and cheese and berries, but what if I did not eat?*

A while ago, my boyfriend left me. Bella says it's sexy that I go around my small circle in town saying, "He broke up with me. He left me. He quit." Sexy, but I don't know how not to: he didn't leave, and he wasn't my boyfriend. He was my fiancé. He stays in, deep in, a granite fissure in Manhattan. I stay in Minnesota and go out. I go out to meet the girls—old girls, new. We go on, trifling with language that's in use for us. Hot, cool, loving women with not cool, not loving husbands or with hot, cool, loving boyfriends or with no husband or boyfriend: *duende* for a season or a reason for a while.

"You don't like the word 'cunt,'" my fiancé said judiciously. "I like it but not as a first name," I said.

Bella shows me a heavy, beaded necklace that matches my boots—beige-tipped and turquoise-shafted, the turquoise color not visible under jeans. I bought the jeans already tattered so I wouldn't have to wait for them, but they are all cotton without added stretch, so I wait anyway, stand around cased in them, dropping pounds walking and talking ceaselessly in them, talking and walking, while the air in the rooms turns pale red. He'd spy me dancing to paragraphs, gorging on beer then pizza yet growing loose and looser in the limbs until I feel like a girl again, a go-girl on a budget, a Gidget, a gadget. Yes, I say to Bella: I'll take the beads and black wool wrap with alpaca feathers and peacock brooch starred with crystals. I wind the stole around my jeans and pin the peacock at my hip. The wrap swings like a thick skirt over the jeans and beige boots. The peacock sparkles. They say and it is: subject for a runway.

Bella tells a story about a woman, an acquaintance, who came into the boutique with her boyfriend, the woman smelling of an STD. We perk up, listen. What STD? The smelly one, Bella says. The one with impossible syllables no one has heard of. Men of the north reject condoms and motorcycle helmets. The law permits you to break your head.

We walk to the Narrows from the boutique, fortified by talk of men and fashion. The Narrows is a blues bar known for outbreaks of small violence. I am wearing the winter white swing coat I bought for the wedding and the gold and turquoise beads.

A crowd parts to assess us. We take our seats at the corner of the bar. At the boutique we drank vodka. If I want to kill myself, but I don't, not here, not now, I'll order red wine. I ask for a Stella. A handsome man is already sitting at the bar. I eye him as I slide in next to him. He has beady green eyes. We go straight to politics. He is a Republican who lives on the Lake and commutes to Wall Street. Here, I am not surrounded by liberals on a sofa. Liberals are irresponsible dreamers who know nothing about finance, he says. I am not a liberal I tell him, but a leftist, a *feministe*. I hate abortion—keep it legal, I say. I am wearing the sapphire ring. I have no friends and no enemies. My fiancé left me, I say.

An hour of this, a radio hour of talk-fucking, his green eyes boring into me, he leaves, and I turn, isolated. "He's married!" I say to Jen, "after I invested an hour in it." Jen laughs and repeats to Bella what I say. Bella has to leave. It's ten. I move to her seat and into the brown eyes of a bald man shorter than I, a Libertarian distributor of faux tin ceiling panels. He sails in summer, ice boats in winter. I am a leftist and a *feministe*, I tell him. My fiancé left me. When we get up to dance, I feel drunk, but he holds me at the waist, and my legs kick out freely on the tiles.

If I get caught drinking and driving, I'll go to jail for a year. I tell the man with the brown eyes to

drive us. Where are we going? To his house, he tells me. His friend, also named Tom, gets in the backseat. That Tom wears tiny spectacles, and I think that I have gotten it backward and that the glasses-Tom is the intellectual, but what if none of us is? I put on the seatbelt.

At Tom's the other Tom says good night in the driveway, and we go upstairs to where a clean white dog with beige spots and beautiful brown eyes is watching us. Tom leads me to a black leather couch in one of the living rooms. He strips me: boots, jeans, swing coat, beads. In moments, he's in me. He's not large, not small, slick. This—that—entry—is *raison d'être*. "Clean as a whistle," I say to the air, meaning no organisms, the organisms you can feel on contact. "Tight," he says.

My fiancé said, "It was like having sex with the Holland Tunnel to be fucking Diana. My wife, that was sex in a monkey patch. But sex with you is the sweetest, snuggest space."

I'm glad Tom rolls me over and buffs me again. I call out in the dark that I'm a Jamaican. Another man comes near the room and stands in the door. He says something, but I miss it. I don't know who the other man is, but I see his shadow watching us. I wish the second man would come in, but there is pause in his distance. Later Tom tells me it's his foster son. Tom is 61.

I wake in the bed looking out at a giant golden maple, not knowing what town we are in. "What town is this?" I ask Tom, and he tells me but I forget. He answers my next thought, "I can't get you pregnant."

At breakfast, Kevin, who is 23, tall, dark, and impressive, sees me in the light. "I thought you were African when I heard you," he says.

"British and Swedish," I tell him.

"I might be Arab," he says.

Car Talk

Bella asked me to do this, when we kissed at parting and said, “love you,” she said, “write this when you get home,” and I laughed, and I said, “I never know,” and she said, “do it,” so I pretended I’d think about it, but really I was thinking about getting the car out of the tight spot in the lot. I walked on stilts to the car and realized I had been right to worry. I had drunk a Kettle One martini with olive juice spilled in it, “dirty”—as good as Thomas Moore’s in Houston, martinis he lost his job icing too long, a real waiter who could mix. I forgot and it boosted my driving morale that I had drunk three small glasses of champagne at the boutique before we went to dinner with the other women. I turned on the motor and started inching the Infiniti FX35 2005 out of the spot. A helpful silver fox stopped to guide me, three times forward and three times back: Why were people nice? Why were men nice? Why were my shoes tall? Why could I walk and drive in them? Light blue (“denim”) suede Michael Kors platform sandals and 7 for All Mankind jeans that smoothed and defined curves the Vietnamese brands missed. I mean, I didn’t look like myself. I looked like my old self, my twenty-something self, long blond hair, Versace sunglasses. I thanked the silver fox and swung the car out of the lot. Internally, I was a crone, and I didn’t care what I looked like: an ethic borrowed from my mother who cared about clothes but not hair. It had been Tom at the wharf who strode over to greet me, his friend Tom with the small spectacles standing at the bar. “Write it when you get home,” Bella said. I was wearing the same beads. She was closing her shop to open a shoe salon.

I had gotten test results that day, six months after Tom and I had last had occasion. I didn’t know if there had been a reason for all the tests, but the nurse practitioner, a with-it lady with dyed dark hair, had said there was. Everything negative, what you want to hear: hepatitis C, negative, HIV, negative, chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis negative, clean, clean, clean, a 48-year-old virgin in her car, the car I wrote a check for at Wayzata Nissan. The salesman had been named Jim and still sent postcards. I didn’t tell Tom of my cleanliness, let him guess as he had let me. My fiancé was back in the picture, a turn of phrase that was a cliché, something people said not meaning, not imagining a roving-eye camera catching and missing people. I knew he loved me. Tom liked me. It was a lot of tests to like someone who couldn’t be trusted, as if because I knew him so well, I *could* trust my fiancé to use a condom if he discovered that he liked someone. He probably trusted me to insist on a condom. He probably trusted me not to like someone that way, to tell him if I did. “I love only you,” I proved to him. I could trust him not to use a condom and to confuse spellings of the spectrum illnesses even though he was an ace speller. I could trust the word processor to correct me as much as I needed correction now that I knew my blood was pure of the type A. These thoughts romanced my driving.

Family names. Naegele. Ridder. Bella’s and my boyfriends. Naegele the billboard company, Ridder of Knight-Ridder. Naegele I’d read about in *The New Yorker* in a story about entrepreneurs by Malcolm Gladwell. Ted Turner. Ridder had owned the Vikings. Naegele owned the restaurant about which the women complained during the meal. I said the food was good, especially the asparagus. The martini was great; another appeared when one of the women, a summer girl, discovered not liking any martini. I smoked a Nat Sherman on the wharf where Tom found me. Tom and the other Tom whiffed the money when I gestured upstairs to the screened dining porch where the women ate salmon and Juicy Lucy’s instead of Monday burgers on the wharf with the men. Boats glided into the docks. I let the men think it: whores. My fiancé’s ex-wife used that word to describe me. I knew her finances as she thought she knew mine: she’d given birth to two heirs she raised on Long Island. She’d been to Catholic and city universities, and she’d heard the word “whore” to describe doctors in her childhood. I first heard the word “whore” out of context spoken by a French-American to mean all men who work for a living. The word gave him teeth, and he bit it crazily. I will not explain years lost to the subjunctive use of the word at the end of a lost relationship after the boyfriend had pounced, “What do

you want to be a?" then the word like a brick to a glass evening, like Jesus had flown in the back window and out his mouth. I said, "Jesus would forgive me, but I forgot to charge." I couldn't stop crying for a day and lost weight. Self-help readers quoted Marianne Williamson "like hitting the devil in the forehead" as if I were the devil and hadn't read her book.

Irely thongs. Do you say thong panties or thong bikinis or just weekend? I used to hate the word "panty," hate to wear thongs, but then my fiancé started saying "big boy pants" to refer to white cotton briefs I wore under loungewear, full coverage. Grandma pants, I corrected. I plunged the black thong into warm soapy water without removing the card from its hidden back pocket, the card to write my name and address so if I dropped the panties somewhere someone could find their owner, me.

I was here.

Solzhenitsyn Jukebox

My handwriting, slow in coming over many years, is good for lists, but I don't want to read sentences or write in it. Amber is on a list I wrote of things I want to remember of Russia: Rasputin's death and Peter the Great (6'7"). One of my lists I read as a poem in the Bronx. A woman named Svitlana asked to translate it to Ukrainian. I know that if I were willing to write stories in longhand that better stories might result, yet I stay unwilling, realizing how stubborn it means I am, as when I pretended to have read *Gulag Archipelago* for the hell of it. Woiwode recommended *Gulag* to the workshop, had come close to requiring it, but decided to trust us by suggesting it instead, and everyone (except me) did it and didn't speak of it but nodded his and her head silently in the hall or coupled over it. I jabbered away as usual. I said, "Write short talk long, write long talk short." Years later, I wrote in an essay called "Hoss Men"—I didn't know where to send it—write short, die young, write long, die old. I might have gotten a paying job had I read *Gulag*. It was the one fatalistic thought I'd had about recommended reading, not the one time I failed to read something recommended.

I had read Russian literature in translation though only a story or two by Solzhenitsyn before I went on the Russian cruise. The Kempinski was home in St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg has thirty sunny days in a year. I was there for three of them. That was the end. Moscow was the beginning. The Volga and the seas were in between. Looking at bookracks in St. Petersburg affected me like being lost. The English translation section, though the bookstore was large, was meager. Nothing I tried to find had been translated. What had been translated seemed obscure except a tiny book of one-acts by Chekhov. The world did not exist in English there, as it does in some places. Once I even snapped at someone who didn't understand my request for directions. It was frustrating, even a little frightening, to be in Russia and unable to read the alphabet. I could make nothing of the words. We took a week of lessons in Russian on the ship, and I realized my brain had grown too old to learn a difficult language. The boy from Eton already knew the alphabet and many phrases. His grandfather, Sal, said his grandson was a world-class genius whose musical compositions had been performed at the New England Conservatory though he was only sixteen.

A tour group from Switzerland spoke German, and I listened to them. These Swiss were very sexy people, by land and sea, where we met them, not only because they were Swiss—I wouldn't know about the Swiss aside from euthanasia—would euthanasia make a people sexy? These were rich Swiss people in middle age, sexier than Americans and Russians: one woman wrapped her head in a diaphanous black scarf and flicked her legs jauntily in belled slacks and one of the men looked like the Professor on *Gilligan's Island*. We were visiting islands and later in New York when T. got his hair cut, I said *he* looked like the Professor on *Gilligan's Island*. One of the Swiss men asked me to take off my clothes and join them in the hot tub on Mandrogi. I smiled and thanked him then strolled the island with the widows in my group. T. ran up a \$2,000 bill calling the ship from Manhattan.

I tiptoed out of the dining room in the evenings with one of the widows, a woman from Turkey, to smoke on the deck. Smoking was allowed and cheap in Russia. Our group of mostly Yale Alumni frowned on tobacco but sipped vodka at the piano recital. The Serbian bartender recommended Imperia vodka instead of Beluga, and the Turkish widow and I drank Imperia on stools and smoked cigarettes. The Swiss smoked and drank vodka before meals, wine with meals, and vodka in the afternoon and at night.

A retired feminist literary agent named Jackie and her boyfriend, Jock, were on board. Jock was kind as one might expect of a man traveling with a feminist, and Jackie was happy yet stern. She mentored me one day over lunch. She said I had to push a novel to get an agent. She said I'd ruin my life if I got married without a book. I thought I'd ruin my life if I got married without a child. Novel as dowry. I didn't mention my prose poetry chapbook while we were sailing Stalin's Reservoir: *XAM*:

Paragraph Series published by a couple of anarchists farming in rural Wisconsin. I'd seen a Russian anarchist shot to death in a play set in Chicago. His girl committed suicide. Russia with its furs in tents and vodka huts and painted icons: my novel?

On the flight back from Frankfurt a six-foot-tall black woman sitting behind me asked me not to recline my seat. She was American, a youth activity director, fit as an athlete, also returning from Russia. Since we were both tall, I agreeably understood. Russia seemed mostly white and a little Asian and not very mixed. An estimated fifteen million people live in Moscow, yet I saw only one black man there—dressed in a Revolutionary War costume.

I had taken leave of the widows when they went to their seats in first class. I thought T. might have thought of that when booking the ticket: to seat me with Yale ladies on the plane. My legs swelled on the flight. Then in the middle of the night in New York, a large painful lump formed in my breast. I spent the next several weeks in doctor appointments and ended up with a partial mastectomy. The lump had been some sort of infection, not cancer. The scar mostly healed, and T. said it had healed. One of the widows on the trip, Phyllis, returned to New York to learn she had pancreatic cancer, and though we called and wrote emails, we never saw each other again.

The day I flew back to New York from St. Petersburg, Solzhenitsyn died. T. was personally affected since Solzhenitsyn had been his neighbor in Vermont, and Solzhenitsyn had met T.'s dog, James. I wondered if the obituary were the cure for not reading *Gulag*. If I submitted old stories to major houses—something I had avoided in the 90s in favor of submitting less old but cold stories to smaller houses, who later claimed not to want short fiction—I might call them “early” or “neglected” and still find a job.

Two friends solicit me for prose poetry or something like the Bronx list. It's turning me suspicious that they can't get through anything longer than a few words unless they wrote it or the writer is famous, famous like Solzhenitsyn? Prose poetry is for rebellion, I say.

A mystique has settled on my sister's hair. My sister is an artist. Rather than feel bad, if she and her friends are going to feel sorry, for her uncle the psychiatrist or her sister the writer for having bipolar, she mythologizes her kinship to them—*whatever that is*, she says.

Hoss Men

An Essay in Prosetics

“hoss”: a survey that provides monthly and quarterly statistics on new single-family non-farm house sales

Previous day:

Sonia would quote Oscar Wilde to me in the kitchen at 1747 Kipling, Houston, “If you can’t tell a lie, tell the truth and get it over with.” I wonder now whether I ought to have looked that up then. We didn’t have internet yet, and the library on campus was picked over, like chicken bones, and the public library downtown required underground parking. Think of what guards once did to keep people away from the books. In high school, the “geeks,” as the intellectuals were called, had to cross a line, like a picket line, where cheerleaders and their jock boyfriends sat on the steps in protest of knowledge, to get to the library doors. Call Sonia and ask, “Where did you get the Oscar Wilde quote, the one about truth, get it over with?”

We loved to yak; the truth is, in my kitchen or her living room, aware that her bearded jock poetry boyfriend may not have approved our unsupervised pursuit of intelligence. Our books, not our books for writing (the books we thought we were and would be writing, and more than writing, but sending and publishing, a game still mysterious to us, though we meet people every day who have mastered it, their lines and pages glued together between glossy paper covers for which they did not “pay”) but others’ books, our reading (a fragment). The men forbade books in their non-absolutist way—they agreed that one lesbian should be allowed to disseminate (word)—and recommended the sexual life to the rest of us, to those thin enough for it, instead, as if sex were patriotic, as if the sexual life were the only life they would reward in us, not minding their anger and rage when it came to conflicting lines of ownership, the words they’d slur us with—*nice*—a number, what we knew in our rental units of “zoning” and “no zoning.”

The men in bidding us to lead the sexual life did not sublimate (Freud).

We didn’t learn “publishing” at school, didn’t learn how to turn “writing” into “books,” or, if we did learn “submissions,” it failed. The pupils at other schools learned more—they learned the books, and they “have” the books. We learned it is better not to. Living, as God said, is paradise (prelapsarian) without the tree.

Save a tree than to publish a book, helper to be a ghost.

Next day:

A few of our *compadres* in Barthelme’s school were “waiting” to walk through the door of the “establishment.” A car from the service would escort them. Barthelme had died. Someone said talent was not enough. I said if a single thing could be enough, talent then. The quiet surrounding the elections was the quiet of a library or the quiet of the secret service. Were you with “them” or against? Were you one of them or one of the others? Were the others us or against us? Were you “for” war or against it? Were you for Israel or for the Palestinians? Were you an upstart who’d seen a thug from your car window late at night? Did you know whom “paggers” were for? I said paggers were for doctors at the symphony, but someone else—who knew more about new technology than I did—said paggers were for drug sales, drug, not meaning pharmaceutical.

Years pass, years without remittance, admittance to salary as a professional, years spent swallowing the pills of conformity—I said it was like communion. What had the hoss men said? I focused on my friend’s family in Jerusalem and on my early boyfriend from Haifa. Despite the controversy, the confusion over drug v. non-drug, a pill might be needed to balance the mind/body. But was a war needed to balance the economy? I didn’t think so.

There were poets’ “wars,” waged with toothpicks. The front was not in the South nor in the North. Nor was it out West where the bookstores flourished nor in the East where a tree grew. In Brooklyn? where rent was a little lighter. We were guessing. And what of “the short story,” literary genre that proliferated yet ceased to exist after the “renaissance” of the 1980s? A few of those writers had gone down “early.” Carver had died. An epic novelist, men reasoned, would live longer. A heart attack was reported as a suicide; a suicide in an epic novelist was based on “experimental.” The turnstile let one slide in beside the others. No car would await thee at the airport, but the train would arrive.

Same day (as “next day”):

What I mean is: you—one—could go it on your own, research the mechanics of printing, hire or appoint an editor, see about distribution or wait for someone to ask you, someone kind with a good disposition, someone adept at handling her own affairs. You could litmus test her or more likely, she, you, about the Palestinians. “My tobacconist is one. His wife is from Jordan.” Are there K-marts in Jordan? Can you see Jordan from your flophouse? She could test you on “post-modern-ism.” You could try a position. You could try a translation. You could post it.

The day after that (after “next day”):

The long interview referenced childbearing. A son before 30 meant two contracts.

Yesterday (the day after “next day”):

The hoss men selected one natural light blonde and two Asian-brunettes for young motherhood and timely publishing. I was a dark Swedish blonde—not gone gray—with a total of four fiancés and a Scottish name meaning, “ghost.” “Fiancé” could land a redhead a teaching post, but could it land her a son-book on deadline?

It came down to fathers and schools, to *alma mater* and Dad.

Today (Oct. 14):

I suggest that we discuss L.’s piece as a whole on Oct. 21 and A.’s novel as a whole on Oct. 28 (or later); that will give me a chance to get A.’s whole novel from her. I have chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 12. A. gave me chapters a few years ago in MN (which may have changed since then) and another set of chapters—T. says it is chaps 1-4—which she suggested I pass to T. over the summer. How many chapters are there? It’s 350 pp. or so, right?

I’m getting tense as I write this because I also have C.N.’s rapidly changing and unfinished new novel parked on my hard drive and T.M.’s experimental novel. I would consider referring the two of them for an experimental “group.” I’m also supposed to work as editor for two journals and single-handedly publish a chapbook. I haven’t heard from my own chapbook “publisher” in the collective, and I haven’t been paid for this work in years.

The method for novel that I learned from Woiwode is to write straight through once in pencil, without (you or anyone else) reading or rereading it, before rewriting—three months or so for a 350 pp. first draft. To rewrite as many times as needed. To work on the next book while waiting to hear from

editors. In the workshop at Binghamton, we met weekly as a group to discuss praxis in a highly focused way without “workshopping” chapters. Larry later read and line-edited all the novels. We heard read aloud every chap. 1 at semester’s end. Then we arranged with individuals to read next drafts as we liked. It was the only novel workshop in the country at the time (‘87) besides Kesey’s at Eugene in collaborative novel.

Gardner had died; he was no experimentalist nor was he short-shrift. People downstate thought “suicide.” Everyone upstate knew it was a fluke motorcycle accident, word spelled in Texas with an “x.”

Agents, I have little idea. Woiwode supported his family in the 60s by publishing in *The NYer* (his friends were De Niro and Barthelme), so perhaps there was little trouble in his finding one. E.W. met his at a bar. He publishes in Paris and Texas and just got his movie deal. L.R. sold her first novel without an agent and didn’t recommend it. B. met “my” agent at the Cedar, but that agent and so many others didn’t want short stories or novellas.

Virginia Woolf wrote her novels in the morning and edited her morning’s work in the afternoon. She and Leonard Woolf self-published as Hogarth Press. How much is “500 pounds” in today’s dollars? A room of one’s own—with a lock from the inside not the outside as in psych hospitals—or no lock needed? *Angel At My Table*.

Day of a birthday (Oct. 15):

Barthelme had picked G.W. as best, G.W., not G.W.H., who was best at Gardner’s school. Twenty years later, a group of men arranged to get the best of G.W.’s six novels and two short story collections into print. They invested in hardcover. His daughter was already in college by then, his ex- still the subject of controversy if his name arose: I had always thought she was “smart.” Some of the women had been strippers, but the ones we knew were smart.

There was an audience for it, for stripping. I had never been to a men’s club; later I queried in my hometown—no writers—about strip joints. Four had double-dated as marrieds there. There were strict laws in Minnesota about the width of the panty fabric. No panty, then a plexiglas window separated patrons from the stripper. I asked to go to one, and P. took me. He was from California. The drinks were expensive and abrasive. Men who looked like they’d been beaten with the pole sat ringside beside women who looked like Henrietta Stackpole. There were two strippers; to call them dancers elevated them but offended ballerinas. One was a teenaged Pacific Islander who draped herself over the pole like a moth. The other was a customized blond high-kicker. A group of four men surrounded the blonde where she sat on the edge of the platform to talk. This was before I had bought clogs, shortened my hair, and grown my hips and thighs. I stood there skinny-as-a-half in “big hair,” ankle boots, and black eyeliner. P. was in radio, not books. He had a sense of humor. I was researching a different man for a novel.

Today (Oct. 21):

We didn’t meet as a group today to discuss and critique the novel and long poem because everyone was writing poetics papers on deadline, leaving me to wonder about the art and practice of writers reading (again). The long poem veils its willingness to be about the poet herself, and like many novels under 300 pages (about the writer under 30) this seems like a long story.

Later the same day (Oct. 21):

V., I gave version 2 (27 pp.) a rest. This is the distillation of 300 pages sans any previously published sections. It has proven to be a pliable form—as I re-read, I’m riveted (even though I wrote it) until I get

to a section about Australian birds and neurosis followed by the lake—the whole lake at a glance or that one fish—and “The Dream” and the rest. These are necessary passages (I assume in that I edited cautiously in ‘94 in creating a distillation), but that’s where I flag—around 20 pp. or so. Is it me or did you flag there in reading it, too? I ask because I’d like to keep working it a while if there’s still a little time. The other 270 or so pages are in Minnesota, and this is the second not the first time I wrote so long and left out so much. I suppose it’s a rant—it degenerates and becomes proof of inhumility and ignorance of very large patterns in the world (induction) as a direct response to being in isolation and eventually to breaking down, etc. As a proof it is sort of interesting, I supposed then, but I doubted people might actually follow it as such and just notice “bad writing.” Something reminded me of this recently when I read Tao Lin’s passages from a recent book and could see how transparent and innocent and unaffected and mad the voice was—it’s not that he’s a lousy writer at all but the loneliness of the composition and the ambition of the project that created it. If you have a chance, please offer editing ideas for the excerpts of *WOWHBS* I sent you, and I’ll try to shape it without leaping out of the chronological design underlying the full version.

Oct. 23:

After I had left school, I reflected that what I had learned about the business I could write on an index card. I knew of three deals.

The trails in my hometown are marked by signs with universal symbols on them, rather than words. One winter day, when it was bright like spring, and the snow was shrinking in its piles by the road, I returned from the mall on a mission: I had bought ivory gloves, a hat, and a ring. I had written a long story about a young academic in Houston who takes up with a rock ‘n’ roller instead of the man who had offered to marry her, the one who was more like her, because sex with the rock ‘n’ roller was better and more often. In bed with him one day, she realized that he might lie there indefinitely reflecting lyrically about China—the year was 1997—but not buy her an engagement ring, that he would more likely buy her an ice cream. Her school, she realized, might not pay her, and she’d have to pay herself, buy her own shoes from Latin America (she said). The young academic in the story is a poet who rarely writes poems, not a novelist. By then I knew that fictions have a way of coming true—a compelling argument for carefulness, one we followed by model, not one that teachers elaborated due to fear of seeming religious. On the index card about the business, I could have written “truth is stranger than fiction,” but even the tow truck driver might know that. Why go to schools?

After I had completed the beginning of the story, I set out to true it by buying items mentioned in the story—shoes from Latin America, for example, a diamond. I turned over every shoe in the women’s shoe department at the downtown Dayton’s—all of them made in Italy—when the clerk, acting suspicious, came over to supervise me. I ended up buying a shiny pair of Italian black oxfords for \$163. I bought diamond earrings next, a half-carat, for \$285, reduced from \$425. It was my lucky day, the jewelry saleswoman said, and she was almost right.

Deals were usually kept private, with little mention of money. These were not listings for *Publisher’s Weekly*. I still hadn’t bought the ring, the engagement ring that no man in my real life had seen fit to buy, concerned as he was that it should cost two months’ salary. On the next leg of the mission, I bought a spring stone and diamond ring at the flea market at the mall. I paid \$287 for it, reduced from \$325. And I bought the ivory gloves and hat. Then I drove in a blaze of sun down the horse trail. I had not noticed the triangular orange sign with the picture of a horse on it. The car bottomed out at the bottom of the first hill, and I walked two miles home, wearing the hat—a woven one that felt like a basket on my head—the ivory gloves and under it the ring. The police were at my house two minutes after I got there, and I had to explain to them how I’d missed seeing the horse sign. Long story short—I never finished the other story as a novel—the sun down, I tipped the tow truck driver \$15.

Oct. 24:

It had been lost on me that shoes from Latin America were not available for sale but cocaine was—this was the 1990s; or had cocaine been replaced by speed manufactured in people's houses? Pictures of chemical explosions were on the news. Young people had burned their skin. One young man posed under a portrait of Jesus. One young woman's skin would never repair. Her face and body would always look like that—an unmade bed. It was a drug war after the fact. It was the war of a generation, but who knew which generation or what the sides were? Was it Colombia flaming the U.S. with a forest fire of addiction? Was it Canada using the internet to deluge the U.S. with prescription drugs without a prescription? Had it been the C.I.A. turning its back on crack cocaine manufacture in California while Honduran exiles sent millions in proceeds to the Nicaraguan contras? Was it a war against blacks and poor whites to help stoke the military and the burgeoning prison complex? John Kerry had stood up to the Senate, but he stood alone. When I voted for him, it was with adoration. "My Crush on Daniel Ortega."

Let's talk about "academic unemployment" for writers. Free speech was porn. "I'm sure you'll have a very interesting novel about academic unemployment," the agency in Minnesota had written about the story about Frederika, the academic in the novel. "What do you want to be, a rogue journalist?" someone else had asked later when I had applied newspaper editing to writing on the internet. He had published a story in *The Washington Post* when he was nineteen, a white Republican from a political family at school at Howard in D.C. He dropped out of college to do drugs. Now decades later he was bullying people at AA in Pennsylvania, a secular Republican opposed to the welfare state, to fat on people's bodies, and to bipolar disorder, an insurance salesman whose goal was to renovate his farm house and work three days a year. I never met him, but that's where I sent the beaver.

My short story collection had been returned nine times. It had had the following titles: *Table-Talk* in 1988; "*Hymen*" and other stories; *Hogging the Lady*; *The Universal Girl for It*, and in 2000, *Institute of Tut*. I finally stopped sending it when FC2 rejected it. *Fax the Beaver* was its last, secret title. The beaver is a dirty trick, and it belongs on the index card. All the 21 stories in the collection have found separate "homes," as people say in publishing (that and "shepherd," as if publishing were a gathering of Jews for Jesus), except one about young writers called "Raisins," one about childhood called "The Hostage," and one about M.K. called "Hymen."

"Hymen" ran through workshop three times. It was another writer's interview piece. It was becoming boilerplate for a textbook. Later it was edited until it was a story about anti-Semitism instead of a story about rednecks in upstate NY, egalitarian rednecks who were vigilantes for choice. That reader's fear was of the hinterlands. One could hardly blame her that she had not read much in "the paper" about redneck vigilantes for choice nor met one. In fact, she didn't read the paper, the paper once wrote.

Oct. 25:

Litmus

Last night a group of poets who thought my name was Alison or Susie invited me to eat with them at a Ukrainian restaurant. It was my duty as their guest to remember one fact and "divulge" it regarding my publishing assets. The obvious, though it slipped my attention, is a poem I had recited at a gallery in the Bronx that is to be translated to Ukrainian. I had momentarily forgotten it. The woman with a farmer girl's blond braids whom I knew by her name and A.S.'s endorsement let me know at table—there were six of us—that I have an internet "presence" that extends beyond explicable borders considering I don't "have" a book. I "have" a chapbook, I told her stupidly, joyously. Later I compared our internet presences at Google—hers is vast compared to mine and pertains to two books that I could

readily locate. She is a visual artist who is also a poet and disagrees with the academic study of poetry. I ought to have praised her for her letter and poem; instead I had praised her past revealed in her letter. I feel like telling her now about the town of La Crosse and the Tom Waits song about heaven. I feel like praising Truck for not showing. I had gotten lost and not shown for a reading in St. Paul and compared it to Arthur Craven's disappearance. I rarely meet someone in New York who is not a Christian-Buddhist-atheist. The poetry hidden in the underground poetry market sounds gray through a cave of filtered light. The "difference" between internet and "print" is transition.

Oct. 25 (cont'd):

My chapbook in the underground market is a "book" at 30 pp. with color art. She had asked, how are you "there" (on the internet), not are you late, nor why are you here, nor what are you (as the square-faced lady had said on Halloween in '90). 56, the traveler. 22, grace. Fiction, I said, not meaning it.

Oct. 25 (cont'd):

rose
helmet
fink
bed
light
one

Submission guidelines:

1984-2008

[paragraph]

Sunday, Oct. 26:

rose helmet fink bed light one

Guidelines (1984-2008):

"old school" wait single submissions solicited unsolicited rejection slip form rejection slip written rejection acceptance word count deadline S.A.S.E. postage envelope street address postman post office contract assistant editor guest-editor genre editor editor publisher Gordon Lish *The Quarterly* agent William Maxwell literary journal George Plimpton *Paris Review* magazine *nom de plume* *The New Yorker* Daniel Menaker *New York Times Book Review* Radcliffe Publishing Institute M.F.K. Fisher's "war cake" Virginia Woolf H.D. Christa Wolf Margaret Atwood Grace Paley Adelaide Morris *Nineteen New American Poets of the Golden Gate* Lorrie Moore J.S. Marcus Knopf small house large house vanity press mss. double-spaced 12-pt. nlqr nlqs Times New Roman floppy disk word-processor Word Perfect cut-and-paste pencil imagination pagination margins draft revision proofs I.B.M. Selectric typewriter *Writer's Market* advance royalties subsidiary rights first North American rights copyright Lillian Hellman Mina Loy e.e. cummings Theodore Dreiser Gertrude Stein Theodore Roethke Emily Dickinson Sylvia Plath William Carlos Williams Elsa Baronin von Freytag Loringhoven Jane Bowles Gregory Corso Kenneth Rexroth Ivan Turgenev James Joyce D.H. Lawrence *The World Split Open* J.D. Salinger Beats Dada Alexander Cockburn T.S. Eliot Bloomsbury Group

Anais Nin William Burroughs Stephen King *Grey Gardens International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses* mIEKAL aND Xerox independent press Pushcart Prize micropress L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Bruce Andrews Lyn Hejinian Leslie Scalapino Ron Silliman creative writing program Iowa Cornell Stanford Sarah Lawrence Johns Hopkins U-Mass. Buffalo S.U.N.Y. U. of H. Ph.D. M.F.A. B.A. M.A. M.L.A. A.W.P. J.I.L. Ch.H.Ed. canon theory abstract concrete ethnopoetics Jerome Rothenberg Pierre Joris Larry Woiwode *MSS*. Robert Bly Allen Ginsberg Robert Creeley Amiri Baraka Naropa Binghamton Community Poets Eudora Welty Anton Chekhov William Shakespeare Sherwood Anderson multiple submissions multi-submissions Timothy Liu Amy Hempel Lydia Davis Linda Gregg contest fee contest judge grant application writing retreat writing seminar writer's colony conference convention typography minimalism maximalism pomo experimental conventional collaboration text font illustration cover design author photo writer poet poem long poem series poem epic poem letters hard cover paperback soft cover anthology book release party publicity movie rights David Kay book tour poetry reading fiction reading book signing meet the author Marguerite Duras Clarice Lispector Jean Rhys Donald Barthelme bookstore independent bookstore chain bookstore Amazon Bookstore publishing collective distribution mass market trade paperback chapbook novel novella flash fiction prose poem short story memoir autobiography letters creative nonfiction literary genre "stuff" James Robison Rosellen Brown contacts family partners lovers friends newspaper paper weight black pen blue pen red pen PEN read submissions reading period fall semester spring semester winter quarter summer quarter trimester international translation Nobel Pulitzer Guggenheim Mac Arthur N.E.A. fellowship grant St. Mark's Poetry Project Anne Waldman Woodland Pattern Laurie Anderson *Diverse Works Fiction International* Harold Jaffe *Washington Review* Mark Wallace *Black Ice* Ron Sukenick The Loft spoken word slam Richard Howard Alice Quinn C. Michael Curtis Rust Hills children's books women's studies African-American studies Asian-American studies Hispanic Studies American studies comparative literature English politically correct multicultural Macintosh Apple I.B.M. P.C. name recognition full-length member dues AOL url disability Chaim Uri Bob Dylan Leo Kottke electronic submissions paper submissions email address Amazon Lulu SPD *Minnesota Literature Newsletter* Open Book Sid Farrar Maria Damon Hannah Weiner website weblog WOMPO Poetics Wrying-L Alan Sondheim listservs Michel de Montaigne Kathy Acker has died distribution webmaster d.i.y. copyleft download print-on-demand podcast mp3 email Facebook-friends Bowery Poetry Club Bob Holman *Mad Hatters' Review* Carol Novack *Big Bridge* Vernon Frazer DVD FC2 *ebr* epc Orono Rod Smith James Tate John Ashbery Jean Valentine Adam Fielded poetics prosetics vispo Sheila E. Murphy Charles Bernstein Amy King Lee Ann Brown Sean Killian litmus test barter at-cost favors fashion model commercial model community model

(600 words)

Oct. 27:

One light bed fink helmet rose

one
light
bed
fink
helmet
rose

Oct. 29:

1991 Mixed-genre multi-genre intergenre intragenre hybrid genre attention span reader multimedia

audio video CD perfect-bound saddle-stitched folio alternative book fair *ABR Rain Taxi* innovative style form friction process product

Oct. 30:

Garrison

New Year's Eve-to-New Year's Day, 1991

“In Israel, a garrison unit (Hebrew: *cheil matzav*) is a regular unit defending a specified zone such as a city, a province, a castle or fortress, or even a single building.”

T.C., her mother and I were drinking champagne by the bottle. We had drunk a case of it. We were in for the night, not driving. Outside it was cold, many degrees below zero; with the windchill it was 45 below. The doorbell rang. The dogs barked. T.C.'s mother, G.C., let them in. One of the men was T.C.'s first sex partner in high school. It could take a day to remember his name, and I might confuse him with someone else in high school, create a false attribution. I could place a call to get his name, but I am no longer on friendly terms with T.C. I don't recall his name, but it was he, the same jock from high school who had broken her. She was not a jock. The nameless jock was tailgated by P.S., a different P.S. than one previously mentioned in this story, not to confuse them. P.S. had been my secret admirer in junior high. He had sent me a box of chocolates on Valentine's Day in 8th or 9th grade. The nameless jock was in high spirits because he was in the Air Force, about to be deployed to fly a mission over Iraq. He and T.C. hightailed it upstairs, and I stayed downstairs saying “no” to P.S. We must have been pretty drunk. We must have sat there for two hours. I didn't want to drive in that weather at that hour. P.S. wouldn't take “no” for an answer, so I left. I drove three miles before the car stopped groaning in the cold. I thought of the word “garrison.” I thought it was on her part like sleeping with the enemy. It was unclear who the enemy was. The enemy was not our military. Knowing her, she thought it was sex in defense of Israel. I thought in her horniness she had not had a choice. I thought in my lack of horniness I had had a choice. It was the first I had heard of a mission over Iraq.

Oct. 31:

Halloween

My first thought of the war, then, was of “Israel,” but I abandoned the thought when the war opened in favor of “gasoline.” I had months before that written a short story, “Texas Was Better”—in September 1990 before the war—that begins with a gasoline shortage for boaters. I wrote the story within days of my arrival to Texas from New York in the vein of “what I did on my summer vacation,” but I had, in fact, moved to Texas and was writing as a recent journalist in the vein of a reporter touching foot in a place and writing about it. The “news” in the story is of gasoline prices going up. The rest is a fiction, a poetical investigation of private life, especially of “daydreams.”

November 17:

Postscript

Camille Claudel

L.H. would not remember this because she was not in school with us, but I had taken one look at B.P.

and said, “no thank you” when the other graduate students urged me to believe that he would or could make or break our careers. A. says I like alcoholics best. Here was one I didn’t seem to like. He was an ad man from NY, and, as it turned out, not a very talented poet. I have a stubborn streak. Perhaps B.P. made it for E.W. but broke it for the rest of us. Who among us is tenured? E.W.B.P. is E.W.’s literary executor. Is T.M. tenured? Did T.M. go through B.P.? A. and R.H. say T.M. is a sociopath. Is T.M. “missing”? T.M. got A. her “job.” Is M. M. still “missing”? Why did D.M. and M.M. and A.B. avoid drugs or not encounter them until 1993—into their 30s? What was going on in 1993? That’s when I met G. and saw A. there in her cocktail dress. G. was on coke in high school. A. reminds us that T. M.’s mother was schizophrenic. Am I still missing something? Was I “missing”? I was at home not writing. The therapist said repeatedly to write for therapy only, but it was counter to training, so I sat. Later I wrote about that. Six days at the psych hospital in Houston, so I missed a few conversations. Do the women who published books remember B.P.? L.A.M. may be tenured. B.P. was after her time. Is my forgetting B.P. why I said the other day that I have a life, not a career—I have a life, not a cigarette and coffee sobriety?

T. called B.P. the other day and put us on the phone together. We talked about squirrels. I told him that I was making a chapbook for someone in a chapbook collective, and he said that sounded “creative.” Does it? I’m just dropping someone else’s work at the printer and paying for it. I’m not to the point of asking B.P. to read my poems.

You may have heard A. say that only one of the poems in my present chapbook, my second, the poem called “Borgo Was 29 on His Birthday” is glad to be female. A. likes that poem because it has the word “consumerism” in it, my suspicion, not because it is glad to be female. The female speaker remembers for him because he forgets—is remembering female? and forgetting male? I thought the rememberer in “Head” enjoys watching him from his ceiling—the man in the poem, who is stoned, yet atoned, in his 10th step, exactly where he started. A.’s husband likes my vanity poem, the one I wrote in 1983 but did not submit or buy until many years later, when I ordered in hardcover for my mother. My first published poem. I remember when I presented it to my mother, I said, “This is not prestigious.” That vanity press had gotten more flack than usual because with W.D. Snodgrass at the helm, and larger cash prizes than most prestigious grants, people might make the mistake of thinking it was prestigious. She laughed because she liked it, anyway. *Touch of Tomorrow* is the name of the volume.

Gals. Girls. Ladies. T. can’t pronounce the plural and says “woman” for “women.” L., my former “hick” friend whom A. met, says “gals.” So L. sings but doesn’t write. She sings a drastically deep and sonorous form of the blues and tells everyone to kiss her white ass. She’s 5’2” and 105 pounds—which is not fat, by the way. She dropped out of college at 79 pounds. She remembers witnessing the rape of her poodle when she was young by a much larger dog, a mutt. Then Coco had one baby. L.’s nose is African as my green eyes. She gets Brazilians. She doesn’t like the Jewish people due to the day the school canceled Christmas. She can’t forget it. She cried over it when she told the story to her Jewish woman friend, a bartender, who couldn’t get enough of her. Many alcoholics in L.’s clan. Her dad was in the bar equipment and the bar business. He died at 32 of a heart attack, but some of the kids said he’d been shot at the airport. She is Catholic/Lutheran but nothing really, which is why it jolted her not to worship Christmas at school. It jolted me less, and I loved the dredel song. We went to Congregational church and had church music there, and my father was in the choir—these two men years later, Mr. Soules, who’d had a brain tumor that had left a stitch near his mouth, and my father, Jack Bogle (not of Vanguard but of Gillette), whose prostate cancer had left him bereft but not without strength for the distance. He died in 1992, six months after my trip to the psych ward and the same year B.P. got to Houston. His hair had been gorgeous and shiny and jet black. And his father was of Scottish parents and brown.

When Sonia fantasized about mental hospitals, it was the gothic type that she’d seen in *Camille Claudel*. When A. dreams of it, it is what? The woman the AA group stoned to a pulp was Jewish—

why I left. She'd been to Bellevue in high school for downers she'd bought on 14th St. after early rapes. My family went to all lengths to protect her from her violent husband. She ended up "relapsing" on drugs she'd never used before 19 years of AA, heroin for one. T. brags about heroin. He enacts shooting up. Does anyone go to NA? Is NA just plain out of sight? I agreed to go once with a schizophrenic woman pot smoker from AA. Everyone was 17 years old. One man was 40. I said very nervously in that crowd something I wouldn't say today except at an AA meeting—*I was an alcoholic.*