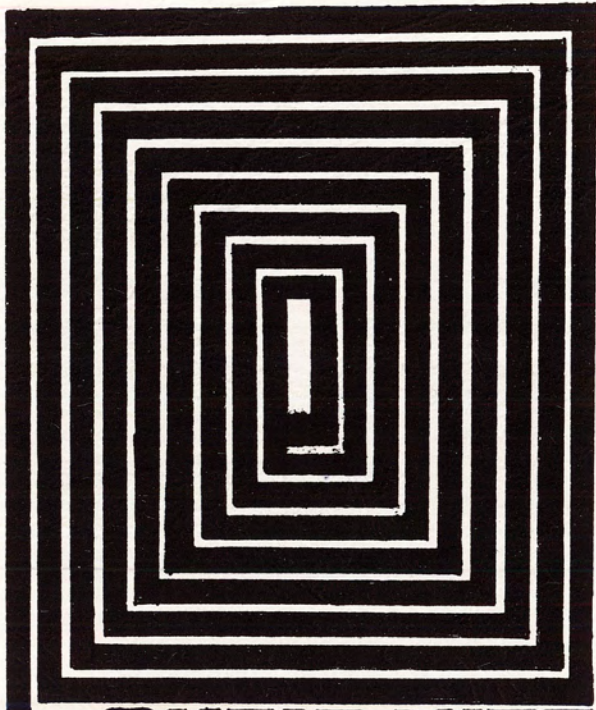


1977



LONFIDANTE

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Confidante is an annual literary magazine whose purpose is to promote and to recognize creative efforts by Delta State University students. The entire staff of **Confidante '77** wishes to thank Delta State University for its financial support, Mr. Jimmy DiCesare for his fund-raising efforts, Mrs. Ernestine Walker for her tireless typing, the many students who submitted works to the annual contest, and members of Lambda Iota Tau.

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* First place local literary competition.

+ Second place local literary competition.

x Honorable mention local literary competition.

Judges in local competition: Sarah Gaddis, Larry Lovelady, Brenda Stockwell, Joe Stockwell



THANK YOU NOTE

Thank you
For last night
With all its sticky loving
And this morning's grapefruit juice.

Thank you for making me feel
Like I'm nearly all you say,
And again for caring whether I
Part my hair in the middle
Or if it's too cold with the window open
Even when you hold me very tight.

I want to be all the morning sounds you need:
Coffee and the Sunday funny papers,
Fifty cents worth of loving, delivered to your door;
A refrigerator full of two-people things,
And zinnias that come up even in the heat.

Make me your smile,
And the tear you don't cry
Because you're a man,
And all the hurts that go
With winters too quickly cold.

Rebecca Hood-Adams



THE LAST CALL

Even before I answered the phone
I knew you weren't coming,
Like an old man knows
When it's going to rain
And a woman knows when
A good thing goes bad
oh yeah.

I forgot to tell you
That the reason
I was so slow in answering
Was because of the tears
Splashed all over the front
Of my first-day dress;
I wouldn't let
You hear me cry,
Not this time at least;
The trust I'd bottled up,
The old beliefs in you,
Were shelved by pride
And not quite necessary hurt.

Perhaps it's better this way,
Better never to have
A one-last-time evening,
Better to leave things
Dangling mid-air;
If I'd had
A night I knew to be
The last
I would have memorized
The way your hair
Creeps down your neck
And the texture of your
Good-bye.

Somehow I think
You wouldn't call back;
There will never be
A just-once-more
To neatly bind up the package
Of hours we spent together.

So it's done:
I hang up the receiver
And sit very still for a moment
Before I walk into the den
And light the wrong end
Of a menthol tipped cigarette.

Rebecca Hood-Adams

LINES FOR JOEL WRITTEN ON A BROWN PAPER BAG

I've been sitting here in my window,
Listening to the radiator gurgle
And watching that young couple leave their third floor room
In the motel across from the Y.M.C.A.
She walks ahead, busily staring at nothing in general,
Measuring each step while wondering
If-her-lipstick-is-crooked-and-will-Mama-suspect?

It made me think of you;
The way you tried to smile
In just the right key
As you bought my toothbrush
And explained too long
That it had to be someone you cared about,
That with just anybody it would have been . . .

Joel.

Sitting on the Quality Court mattress
I heard you sing through a haze of
Rollercoaster rides, blackeyed Susans,
Licking the icing bowl when you're seven, and
Motels are where Daddy stays
When he goes to Chicago on business.

The couple is almost out of sight now;
Turning to go down the stairs
She slips momentarily,
Frowns as he steadies her arm,
Then quickens her pace;
I think about them moving down the street
As I light one last menthol
And wonder why
We never smile
When we sing.

Rebecca Hood-Adams

Conclusions

"Fourth and Davis!" The bus driver bellowed as the bus rumbled to a halt, its wide doors swinging open immediately. The harried crowd of commuters poured through the doors and escaped along the sidewalk as others pushed toward the vehicle. Caught somewhere between the opposite rushes, I elbowed my way through the mass and found myself deposited abruptly on the curb.

I swung my oversized canvas bag to my shoulder and glanced indifferently at the faces that scurried past me. The day was hot and sticky; I could almost feel the stagnant heat drifting up from the hard pavement. I nervously clutched my stack of books and checked my watch for the hundredth time. Remembering my one pending appointment with the seminar director, I shoved my hand into the pocket of my jacket, searching for that important slip of paper. Finding it next to a long forgotten button, I sighed quietly.

The bus had long since departed for parts unknown, and I looked across the busy street at the line of shops and stores. Bringing my hand to my face to shade my eyes, I squinted to find a fairly familiar beanery. Finally taking note of my usual and inconveniently questionable eyesight, I retrieved my glasses from my bag and put them on. Having spotted a small cafe, I made my way across the street with all the care of a Kamikaze pilot.

Reaching the cafe, I recalled the place at once, having stopped there to eat quite often on my jaunts to Memphis. A refuge in a crowded land, I concluded as I opened the door and strode into the pleasingly quiet room. I took my usual window-side table as I unloaded my books and picked up the greasy menu. Gesturing to the waitress whom I remembered as Doris, I ordered the habitual "Black coffee, please."

Putting the menu aside, I heard her mutter something about "Nice seeing you again" as she turned and scurried to another table before continuing to the kitchen. The cafe was cool and almost deserted, it being a few hours after the twelve o'clock rush. I was always glad to stop here and gather my wits before beginning whatever adventure brought me to the city. The afternoon sunlight poured through the spacious part in the nice white and red curtains as I lazily watched people move along the sidewalk like so many scattered leaves.

I picked up one of my many books and was enthusiastically thumbing through it when Doris returned with my coffee and the meager bill. She smiled, setting the cup before me as she said, "I hope you enjoy the coffee, it's fresh." I nodded my thanks as she left me to my nice hot coffee and my nice, boring, but necessary books, I slowly sipped the coffee, feeling the hot liquid blister its way down my throat. As usual, it was strong enough to take the paint off an army jeep; I should have ordered iced tea. Having come across a rather interesting chapter in my book, I momentarily pushed aside my coffee and absent-mindedly smoothed an imaginery wrinkle from my skirt as I gave the book my undivided attention.

"Hello!" I looked up to find some young man quickly approaching my isle of seclusion. "Sara, do you remember me?"

I closed my book and stared at him sullenly, wondering why he dared to invade my privacy. "I'm afraid not," I replied in tones none too cordial, hoping that he'd get the message and leave. Instead, he sat in the chair opposite me and I was fairly amazed and somewhat annoyed at the boldness of his sitting here smiling at me. I was definitely on the verge of calling good ole Doris when some dusty memory was aroused. "John?" I smiled, congratulating myself for even recalling a name. "Of course, John Booth."

"Ah-ha, you didn't remember, did you?" John challenged with child-like zeal.

I smiled at this ghost of my past, as I removed my glasses and rubbed eyes that were suddenly very sore. "It's been quite some time, hasn't it, John?" I inquired of him, hoping to recall the past in the process of the questioning.

"It's been ten long years, Sara, and you haven't changed at all," John assured me with a supposedly knowing wink. "I must say, it's very good to see you again."

"Are you one for cliches now, John?" I demanded of this possible figment of my overworked imagination. I could only recall hazy bits and pieces of the period of my life in which he once resided.

"All right, how about changes for the better," he responded, removing the cap from his head. He ran his square-tipped fingers over his fairly long, slightly uncombed reddish blonde hair, pushing it back from his high wide brow. I now could readily recall those eyes, green eyes, hiding wet and soft behind the lenses of his horn-rimmed glasses. His beard was a wild Irish-red and full, his moustache was thick and bristly. I was remembering his face now and his age, and he didn't look what had to be his thirty-five years.

"How've you been, John?" I thought to ask the usual questions, anything to prod my slow-moving memory. "You still look well."

"Just fine." He said, flashing a bright and movie star perfect smile. "Well, what do you think of them?"

Having not seen dear John in ten long years, as he put it, I had no earthly idea what he was talking about, so I patiently asked, "What?"

"My teeth." He pointed to even white teeth that made his toothpaste-commercial smile. I nodded my indifferent approval and he quickly added, "They're not mine, you know."

"I know." I smiled, it was another piece of the puzzle. Thinking of John with the thirty-four cavities. "They look nice, very real." I assured him, thinking how this conversation was going nowhere in a great hurry.

John laughed and reached out to touch the tips of my fingers, which were now tightly wrapped around the warm cup of coffee. "You can't believe I asked you that, can you?" He took note of the lack of mirth on my face as his fingers gently stroked the back of my hand as he said, "Don't worry, Sara."

Sometimes memories come quickly, too quickly in fact, I thought as I remembered him at once. I suddenly remembered almost every thing about him, and I felt that I was being dropped into the void of our ten

years' separation. He was referring to his finally growing up, and I remembered that grand subject for some of our best fights. "I won't." I assured him as I had assured him of other things at other times.

He winked at me again and then very determinedly began the process of prying my fingers from the cup. "Good."

"What are you doing here?" I asked dutifully, wanting to forget that I wasn't resisting the advances of his fingers. John looked around the cafe, "I live here now. I run a foreign car garage not too far from here."

I thought how only I would fall for a guy who wanted to be an automotive mechanic. My attention was wandering between John's insistent tugging on my cup-embracing fingers and the salt shaker that I was pushing along the table with my free hand. It seemed so strange that I would feel uncomfortable with John. I had loved him once. But, of course, I always felt uncomfortable with people from my past. Especially those people whom I had dared to care about. And John, dear John, could and would be no exception.

I looked at John as he busily cleared his throat with that guttural cough that had always annoyed me. The fingers of my cup-loving hand were his unwilling prisoners as he removed his glasses, wiped them across his jacket and replaced them in the same flowing motion. He wasn't wearing a tie, I gladly noticed. It wouldn't have been John in a navy blue pin-striped suit. He placed his other hand on the table near my other hand, and I thought how nice and square his hands were, nice hands — nice hands that had reached out to touch me when I hadn't wanted to be touched. Like right then, when he was clutching one hand and moving in on the other.

"You live here now?" John asked, breaking the blessed silence that I had hoped would never end. He squeezed my hand, as he commented gently, "Still have our moments of quiet, do we?"

I smiled, surprised and touched that he still remembered my moods. "No, I'm living in Nashville now. I've got a little one woman hideaway there just outside the city."

"The hills of Nashville that you've always dreamed of, Sara," he reminded me to my embarrassment. He remembered so much about me.

"Anyway, I live there," I continued nervously, "I live there and I teach a few classes at one of the universities."

John burst into his unassuming laugh at that announcement, explaining, "If I remember correctly, you said that you'd rather die than end up teaching some dinky English course in some dinky school."

I tried to retrieve my fingers, but he held them tightly as I angrily retorted, "I love teaching there! And the university is not some dinky little school!"

He squeezed my hand again, asking unfairly, "But is it what you want to be doing?"

"If I didn't, I don't think I'd be doing it."

"Whatever happened, Sara, to the internally and eternally beautiful and angry young freshman who wanted to take on the world and all of its injustices? You wanted to show society how to play by a new book and I was the first chapter. What happened?"

He was as disturbed by the new me as I was by this mirroring of what I once was. "I grew up, John, I calmed down. I looked around and settled on a few pages that everyone had forgotten about."

He nodded, studying me closely as he remarked, passing judgement, "I knew they'd ruin you if you stayed there."

The stiff fingers of my free hand tapped an inconsistent Morse code on the table as I tried to recall anything about his leaving the college. He'd left the small community college for bigger and better things. He'd left me to my own meager resources. I had never wanted to remember that again.

"I'm sorry I didn't write," he apologized after ten years, squeezing my hand in assurance that his apology was sincere. "There wasn't much I could say."

"You said it all in goodbye!" I snapped, wanting to punish him for something that had happened ten years ago. Something that had happened for the best.

John looked hurt as he reminded me, "I asked you to come with me . . ."

I laughed, "I shudder when I think that I almost came with you." I laughed to think that I had ever loved this crazy, white, Irish-Indian. But as John claimed my other hand, I saw that it had never been funny. "Tell me, John, did you ever find the girl of your boyhood dreams? The girl made for you in a shade lighter than myself?"

John cleared his throat again as I waited for his answer, letting my vision drift to the gold wedding band on his finger. We sat hand in hand, quietly listening to the combined tickings of our two watches. I nodded at my cup, and he shook his head, smiling, I think, and wiggling his nose once or twice like he had done ten years ago.

John grinned as he tugged at his ear, brushed his moustache and recaptured my fast fleeing hand. "I found her and I married her. And now I sit here holding your hands and wishing that I could hold more than your hands."

I had expected that announcement, and yet, I wasn't prepared for it. I would never be prepared for it. I had always known that. My eyes swept the table as I fumbled for words of congratulations that would not come. I knew that he was looking at me and that he was waiting for an answer. I also knew that John knew me well enough to know that there might never be an answer.

"You'd like her." John went on, trying to help me. "Sara, she's as much like you as I could allow. You should know that."

I wanted to escape then, to reclaim my hands and take up my books and flee the scene. I needed to get away from a memory that had shown up in the flesh. I had been deceiving myself for ten years and the charade was about to end. "I'm glad, but, please, spare me the glorious details." I whispered, hoping that he would understand.

"And you, Sara, are you still a follower of Nikki Giovanni and LeRoi Jones or did you settle down like a nice little black girl should?"

"I never married, if that's what you mean."

He smiled, "You're just twenty-eight, there's time. You weren't the

wife and mother type then either." He shrugged, "Maybe you haven't changed at all."

Oh, but I had changed, so very, very much, and he would never know. "But don't think that you were the only one, John." I remarked challengingly. "Never the only one."

"You got over me like you swore you would." John commented.

"And I never cried over you once . . . never." I added as I withdrew my hands. "But I didn't forget you, John, not really." I could lose nothing admitting so little.

John stood and readjusted his cap as he leaned against the table. "It was very nice seeing you again, Sara, very nice indeed. You never told me what you were doing here, but it doesn't matter now." I looked into his eyes as he stood over me, and it was ten years ago for the last time. "I didn't say this ten years ago when I left for Tech, but . . ."

"Me too, John, it was a time worth remembering." I assured him in all sincerity as I extended my hand to end his thoughts.

John smiled and knew that there would never be another meeting like this one. I reached up to gently brush a few unruly strands of loose hair from his brow. He caught my hand and kissed it gently, "Goodbye, Sara, have a nice life." Like the parting moments ten years ago, he gently kissed my brow, my cheek. He bowed to me in the old world fashion and picked up my bill as he turned and walked to the counter. My eyes followed him as he paid the bill and then walked out of the cafe. He crossed the street, walked to a parked car, opened the door, and then as a silly John-like afterthought, he looked in my direction and waved.

I did not attempt a farewell gesture as I removed my glasses and wiped away the few tears. I sat there waiting, watching as he drove into the traffic. He was gone. It was an end. Memories of an eighteen year old college freshman neatly filed away. Ten years of thought and feelings sealed by a strange chance meeting of two people. I gathered my books and left the cafe.

Sandra F. Camphor

Love Paradox

In solitary conversations with a
Lone and toneless word, I have cursed the birth
Of the first tongue which formed its devil's name;
Villian of each tortured night, vicious
Enemy of mirth, never once shall I
Yearn for its hypnotizing claims; I will never feel the pinch
Of its narrow, taunt confines---
Unless you disregard my words and read between the lines.

Vicki O'Laughlin

ESPOSITION IN HAMLET: ACT ONE

All of the classical works of literature are the results of infinite care and undivided attention devoted to each of their parts by their authors. The author of imaginative literature endeavors to place the proper word in the proper place; he jockeys into position those ideas and events necessary for the effective communication of his theme, whether it's an abstract truth or a provocative idea. In the tragic masterpiece *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare's uncanny literary genius is exemplified throughout, but one particular point of interest is his effective use of exposition, to which he devotes the greatest part of Act One. As Act One of the tragedy progresses, Shakespeare masterfully employs this literary device to provide the tone and overall mood that pervades the entire work.

In scene one, Shakespeare produces an aura of unnaturalness in the kingdom of the Danes. Through the scene's first line, he shows that Denmark, Elsinore Castle in particular, is in a "topsy-turvy" order. In the changing of the castle guard, the sentinel on duty is pressed to identify himself by a sentinel coming to relieve him. Plainly, the order should be reversed; however, as previously stated, the playwright uses the misunderstanding and disorder between these two seemingly insignificant men to show the immanent disorder within the royal house of Denmark itself. Shortly before the relieved sentinel takes his leave, Shakespeare causes him to share with his comrade his sickness at heart, leaving the reader with a feeling that there has recently been a saddening or ominous event as yet undefined. Next, Shakespeare brilliantly shakes his audience with the two appearances of an armored ghost, an anomaly to the folklore of the day, which held that a ghost will appear wearing a white or black shroud, in accordance with his station in the afterlife. But the appearance of a ghost, possibly the ghost of the dead King Hamlet, in battle armor, ". . . bodes some strange eruption to our state;" (I, i, 69), according to Horatio.

Throughout the second scene, Shakespeare weaves a complicated pattern of action by revealing some of the major burdens that have come to rest on Prince Hamlet's shoulders. Shakespeare has placed Claudius, brother of the dead king, on the throne although Hamlet is the crown prince and rightful heir to his father's position. However, Claudius, with the help of Polonius, chief of the Privy Council and Denmark's highest appointed official, has shrewdly robbed young Hamlet of his birthright. But, despite the awesome implications of Claudius' crime, the dramatist focuses all his character's attentions and his griefs on the death of his beloved father, whom his mother has seemingly forgotten after a short time; thus, his pain is increased all the more. As perhaps one of his greatest burdens, Shakespeare produces in Hamlet a sensation of absolute revulsion at his mother's hasty marriage to Claudius, which constitutes incest in the eyes of the orthodox church. In his first great soliloquy, he decries her for having forgotten the love his father had for her, how ". . . he might not beteem the winds of heaven visit her face too roughly" (I, ii, 141-142). He continues to say that a ". . . beast. . . would

have mourned longer" (I, ii, 150-151) over the death of such a man. In the last few lines of his soliloquy, Prince Hamlet notes the speed and dexterity with which his mother married Claudius, decides that such a union can never come to good and, as if he can no longer keep to himself the revulsion he feels, he solemnly declares, "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (I, ii, 159).

In the spirit of true exposition, recording past events for the understanding of present and future occurrences, Shakespeare uses the ghost of Hamlet's father to reveal to the prince the major conflicts around which the rest of the play's action will revolve. Adding another burden to Hamlet's already unstable mind, Shakespeare has the ghost cast aspersions on Gertrude's fidelity to King Hamlet. If Gertrude has not been faithful to her first husband, she will pay the price of a double sin, having on her head the guilt of adultery as well as incest. Furthermore, Shakespeare dumbfounds his tragic prince with the news from his father's spirit that Claudius had stolen past the guards and poisoned the sleeping majesty before he could retaliate, sending him to his grave without the privilege of final confession. The tale was then published that a snake had stung the king and the reptile's venom had done its frightful task. From his shock at hearing these awful details, the fact is obvious that Hamlet had never suspected his shrewd uncle of murder. With the advent of this news and the possibility of his mother's adultery, Hamlet must surely wonder if the "seeming-virtuous" queen mother had any foreknowledge concerning the murder of her husband.

In order to provide a catalyst for the initiation of the play's action, Shakespeare places in the mouth of his ghost a divinely ordained commission to be carried out by Hamlet under certain conditions. First, because the entire social structure of Denmark depends on the integrity of the royal House, Shakespeare spurs his ghost to demand that Hamlet put an end to the incest of Claudius and Gertrude. No doubt Hamlet has desired to end this relationship for quite some time and now he has the authority to do so, granted to him by none other than his father. Next, Shakespeare writes "But howsoever thou pursues this act, Taint not thy mind . . ." (I, v, 84-85), and perhaps the uncertainty as to how to pursue this act leads Hamlet to his madness, symbolized by his procrastination in carrying out this commission. The condition of the commission concerning the tainting of Hamlet's mind comes a bit too late since the young prince has indulged his passion, through personal grief, to the point of almost total negation of his reason. This overindulgence in personal grief leads Hamlet to a sense of private revenge for his father's death instead of a sense of public duty. In other words, Hamlet cannot fulfill the commission given him until he no longer feels such a strong sense of personal loss; he must avenge the death of his father not for himself but for his countrymen. As the commission continues, Shakespeare imposes another condition on the awestruck prince: Hamlet must not punish his mother, but he must ". . . leave her to heaven / And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge / To prick and sting her" (I, v, 86-88). Hamlet must not punish her; her conscience will replace his wrath.

To complete the already stupendous burdens resting on shoulders of young Hamlet, Shakespeare adds greatest and most pressing load the

tragic prince will ever bear. After trying Hamlet's faith in those people he has loved most, Shakespeare lends cosmic significance to his tragedy by confronting his character with the possibility that the theology he has embraced is a falsehood. As a Protestant (he is a student at the University of Wittenburg), Hamlet is convinced that ghosts are merely devils who have taken on the guises of deceased loved ones in order to do some awful deed to those still in the land of the living. Therefore, Hamlet, at this point in time, is torn between his philosophy and what he has just seen and heard. Through this use of ghost-versus-theology, Shakespeare reveals that all that is holy, undefiable and pure to the prince is being shaken and shattered around him. Truly, Hamlet is being almost forcibly dragged from a world of "seems" into a world of reality. Moreover, Shakespeare confronts his Protestant protagonist with a spirit who speaks of a place where his sins are "burnt and purged away" (I, v, 13). Hamlet must surely feel bewildered and completely confused as he cries "O God!" (I, v, 24). No doubt he exclaims not only from horror but also from a desire to be shown the complete truth. Throughout the course of Act One, Hamlet has been steadily moved to the point he has now reached; by the end of the act, Hamlet is standing on the brink of insanity, about to begin a crossing of its never ending gulf.

Therefore, the keen ability of William Shakespeare to use effectively the device of exposition is exemplified throughout all of Act One in his classic tragedy. Through the use of this device, Shakespeare successfully conveys to his audience the knowledge that before the play ever opens its stage is set for the action that will take place thereon. Undoubtedly, the tragic stature which Hamlet ultimately assumes is lent its greatness by Shakespeare's uncanny expository powers.

William Dempsey

All documentation refers to the Signet Classic edition of Hamlet, edited by Edward Hubler.

AUDIENCE

I thought of you today for exactly four minutes.
That's how long it took for you to turn,
wave, and bow to all your fans. The same
smile, same stance, nothing's changed;
except that I'm no longer in the crowd.
Don't take me wrong. I'm no longer
lonely or lost inside. I just thought
you'd like to know I thought of you today--
for four minutes.
Only now I guess it's ten.

Randi Crawford

CONFUSION

The roast in the oven, the taters in the pot,
The children are waking, the iron's getting hot.
The last minutes of quiet are slowly drawing nigh.
How the times to relax sure seem to fly.

Is it Sunday already? O Gracious Sakes!
My shirt has a tear! My socks ain't mates!
Where's my dress? Hey, that's my ribbon!
Who has my shoes? They must be hidden!

My Bible, my offering, my Sunday School book,
We don't even know where to look!
We don't want to leave you in the lurch,
But the Patterson's are busy getting ready for church.

Libby Patterson



MY REALITY
(At Twenty-one)

I was twelve when he said,
"Boy, you gotta face reality.
All you do is play wild music."
But he never told me what reality was.

I was reading
Canterbury Tales and **Paradise Lost**.
He wanted me to have a
Fine Arts Education.
No ball bats for his boy,
No sir, it's opera tickets,
Piano lessons and tap dancing.
Then he wondered;
Where does he get those absurd ideas?
Why does he dress strange?
Why is he acting peculiar?
Then he said,
"Boy, when you gonna face reality?
All you do is play wild music,
Read strange books,
And talk about crazy things."
But he never told me what reality was.

When I was seventeen,
I started college.
That's when he kicked me out.
He gave me a car, bank account
And apartment of my own.
He said,
"Boy, you gotta face reality.
Stop messin' with this wild music,
Strange books and crazy talk.
Lose some weight
And start chasin' whores
Like everybody else."

That's when I took his advice.
I accepted some of his reality.
I lost 140 pounds,
Let my hair grow long,
Got a tan and contacts.
Physically, I became someone else.
Rapidly, I developed a taste for
Sex, cigarettes and wine.

When I was nineteen,
He came by my apartment.
I had a gimlet in one hand,
And a Virginia Slim in the other.
He said,
"Boy, when you gonna face reality?
All you do is play wild music,
Read strange books,
And talk vulgar.
You're pore as a snake
And you're drinkin' yourself to death.
See you've taken up smokin', too.
You'd be better off
If you moved back home
And quit chasin' whores all night.
You never even visit me anymore.
Boy, what happened to you?"

I'm twenty-one now,
Been in college four years,
And I have no intentions of stopping
(ANYTHING).
He's still saying,
"Boy, when you gonna face reality?"
He doesn't know that I have.
I've created my own reality.
It's a little of his
And a lot of mine.
But he's responsible for it all.
Yes sir,
He's given me a
Fine Arts Education.
No ball bats for me.
Just wild music, strange books,
Whores, whiskey and coke;
That's Me.

William C. Williams, Jr.

NIGHT DREAM

Sometimes having a best friend can really get to be a royal pain in the ass. I guess my best friend in Modark, Texas, where I live, is Billy Collins who also happens to live just two houses down on my street. He moved in about three years ago and we hit it off like Huntley and Brinkley or something. The reason I say that best friends are a pain in the ass is really just mostly based on being best friends with Billy. It's not that he's really weird enough to make anybody lose sleep worrying that he's going to blow up the U. N. Building or anything, but he does have a pretty strong tendency to go on odd-ball little binges from time to time. Don't get me wrong though — I'm not making fun of Billy — he is my best friend, and vice-versa too, remember. It's just that he gets really serious — I mean really, really serious about stuff sometimes. As a matter of fact, the things that he gets bent out of shape over a lot are pretty strange, kind of eerie things. Like right now I don't even know where he is or when he's coming back to school or what because of one of those creepy little binges.

I guess I need to explain what I mean when I call the binges "creepy" and "eerie." I mean, I know that's pretty strong language to describe somebody's moods and all -- but it's true. This time is worse than any of the other times that I can remember.

A lot of times when we get out of school in the afternoon we'll walk into town and look around in some of the stores. We don't usually buy anything, but it's something to do, if you don't do it enough so that you get to the place that you know what days the stores get new shipments in or stuff like that. Anyway, Billy and me both don't drive to school yet because we're both just fourteen, and we walk to school and to town.

We walked uptown about three weeks ago and went into the little record store on the corner of Bixwell and Maiden first thing. We both have a few records that we like to play — but we're neither one fanatics about music by any means. We were just looking through some of the records to see if any of the covers were maybe a little nasty while Mr. Landry, the owner, was acting real busy working on his adding machine, all the while watching us out of the corner of his eye like he thought we were going to stick a record down the backs of our jeans. I just ignored him and so did Billy. Billy's best feature is that he's so good at ignoring people when you need to.

After about ten minutes of looking, we were both getting ready to look in another store for greener pastures when all the sudden Billy just froze like a big statue that you might see in front of the library. I mean he looked positively stricken.

"Billy, what's wrong?" I asked kind of quiet so Mr. Landry wouldn't come stumbling over and bother us.

"That record, look at that record," Billy breathed out.

"What rec-," I stopped in the middle of my word because I saw which record he meant. Right on top of the discount table was a record for \$1.99 that had a picture of a girl on it. A really nice looking girl — better than Cher Bono.

"Billy," I was sort of stunned myself, "That's the girl that you're always describing — isn't it?"

"Yeah," he breathed out again. Heck, he was practically panting right in the store.

The girl on the album looked just like what Billy was always calling his "Dream Girl." He must have told me about her — in detail — practically a billion times. I mean, anytime the conversation lulled he would fill me in on a new detail about this girl.

"Green eyes, olive skin, black hair, silver bracelets, a big choker with a piece of jade in it, tall, short fingernails with no polish, jeans." He was almost in a trance in front of the discount table, talking out loud, describing the girl he had invented and the girl on the album cover — eerie.

"Look, Billy," I was talking fast so he wouldn't get arrested for being insane if Mr. Landry called the policeman down on our heads, "do you wanna buy the record?"

"Hell, yes," Billy was snapping out of it, "what do you think I'm going to do — leave her here when I've finally found her?"

"It's a record, Billy, not a person." I flinched because that statement might have been the wrong thing to say under the circumstances.

"Doesn't matter; I'm getting the record," he grunted out.

The next thing I knew we were out in the street a little more than two dollars poorer counting tax, me having to split the price because Billy was almost broke and that's pretty much what best friends are for anyway. At any rate, Billy was really checking the album out — it was sure a dope-smoker if I ever saw one. A dope-smoker album is one that has a big poster included in it most of the time with all kinds of wild colors and there aren't a whole lot of songs on it. Just three or four long ones instead of more short ones. Not that we eat marijuana cookies for lunch or anything. We don't. Neither one of us has ever been goody-goodies or anything, but both our folks have always been pretty strict, and besides that, dope isn't usually blown around a whole bunch by a couple of guys who can barely afford to buy a \$1.99 album. But that album was a real dope — smoker all the same.

"Look at the names of these songs," Billy was beginning to really inspect the thing. "High Rolling, Lost on Cloud Nine, Easy Score, Wild Lights . . . man, this thing's really a dope-smoker."

"Yeah, that's what it is," I agreed. I was watching his face more than paying attention to the album or anything he was saying. That stupid record was really doing something to him.

"Look, I'll see you later, okay? I've got to listen to this by myself in my room. I need to get into it and I can't do it with you around -- I don't mean that in a bad way, y'know?" He said it in a big gush.

"But I paid half," I protested. I was stunned as hell.

"Look, I can pay you back next week -- please?" He looked real pitiful all humbled like he was. I just said that it was okay about the money because he was my best friend and all, and then we both went home. I guess he probably listened to that record all night. It would be just like him to do that. Billy's a little eerie, like I said.

For the next three or four days all I heard from Billy was Rana Syclo. That was the girl singer's name. Don't ask me what kind of name it is because I'm not too good at telling if someone's Jewish or Catholic or

Spanish or what just from their name. Rana Syclo though, that does sound foreign just a little. Billy never let me hear the record, he said it was just too personal, that it would be just like letting someone else take out your best girl. Personally though, I think that his attitude was fairly immature for a guy who's had hair under his arms for over a year.

I still can't get over the way Billy's eyes would sort of sail around in his head when he'd talk about the album. He would tell me how every note on the album sounded familiar to him and how he knew all the words to all of the songs after only hearing the record through one time. Well, I don't know if I believed him or not. I mean, he always sounds really sincere when he's off on one of his binges, but when there's a girl involved you really can't ever tell for sure.

And that's another thing. Billy just doesn't go for girls most of the time. I guess I don't either for sure. We're not queer or anything, don't get me wrong-- we had dates to the Sweetheart Dance on Valentine's Day and all, but it's hard to be really interested in girls when a guy doesn't have a car to go out in. But anybody who heard him rave on would think that he really knew her well enough to have her phone number.

"It's almost psychic man, the way everything in that album is signs," he was telling me one day. "Like, on the inside it says that she was born in West Virginia. That's where I'm from. Her eyes are the same color as mine, the album was released on the same month that my birthday's in. And she dedicated the album "To Billy." That's the clincher. I nearly fell over when I opened up that album and saw my name in it."

"That's probably just some other Billy," I was pretty skeptical.

"Oh sure, I know that," he rushed on, "But that's a sign y'know -- that shows me that she's really the one."

"You're gonna have to wait awhile pal, 'cause from the way she looked on that album cover, she's twenty-three if she's a day. It'll be two or three years before you're even as tall as she is, probably." I don't know why, but I was doing my dead level best to knock him off the cloud he was on. I guess deep down I'm kind of a jealous little toot.

"Do you believe it's dedicated 'To Billy' or not?" He asked it in almost a violent way. I guess my attitude was beginning to get a little irritating.

"No, that's okay. I believe you and all. I mean, you sure wouldn't lie to your best friend about a thing like that, I guess," I said it in a lot nicer way. No use getting into an argument over practically nothing.

Then he really started saying some pretty deep things that were really scary. "Good, I'm glad you believe me 'cause now I'm waiting for the last sign."

"Last sign?" I asked.

"Yeah -- I know that something really symbolic is going to happen pretty soon. I can feel it. Something's going to happen so I can meet her," Billy told me in all earnestness. I couldn't believe he was really serious.

"How can you meet her? You don't even know where she lives. You don't know if that foreign name is really hers or not, man! We never even saw her or heard of her before the day we bought the album in the store. How the hell are you ever gonna meet her now all of the sudden? Is she going to come falling out of the sky the next time a storm blows up? You gonna find her in a jumbo size box of Cracker Jacks?! I could feel my

irritating attitude come screaming back. I also said "we bought" on purpose to remind him that he really ought to pay me back from when I helped buy the record even though I had said to forget it. Really irritating.

But Billy didn't get mad right back at me this time. He just looked me right smack in the eyes, sort of serenely, and said, "There's going to be a sign. I'll know it; and I'll meet her." And then he just walked off and ignored me for about two days. Billy's really good at ignoring people -- a regular professional.

I guess I'm just not all that big on signs.

May I have to take my cousin to the Junior-Senior banquet though, if that goof didn't get a sign just a little later. I had just broken through his two day personality blockade and we were in my living room listening to my transistor radio, when a commercial came on. It was about the sorriest-made commercial I'd ever heard. The guy talking practically had pimples on his voice he sounded so inexperienced. Anyway, the commercial said Rana Syclo was going to appear on the same bill with some other pretty unfamous act in concert at the local junior college. That school was always sponsoring a concert by somebody you never heard of and trying to get people to come. I always wondered where they got their talent, and now I guess I know -- right off the discount table in Mr. Landry's record store.

Well, the radio said that the concert would take place in this new coliseum that they built for the basketball team there (which has won about three national championships in the last five years, I think) and the tickets were only three dollars. Pretty cheap even for a low-grade concert. The show was supposed to be on the next Friday night. Well, just about any fool can probably guess the reaction that the commercial got from Billy, so I don't suppose I'll go into much detail. All I'll say is that I never knew that there were so many different vocal inflections that could be used when saying "I told you so." Some people just aren't cut out to be gracious winners.

What we did next has also just got to be pretty obvious. We went to the blasted concert. It was really surprising to me that our parents let us go. Usually anything that might be fun is off limits to Billy and me. Maybe that's the big thing that the two of us have in common, strict parents. But they let us go anyway, as long as we promised to behave ourselves and stay out of trouble -- a pretty standard promise I guess, with a lot of loopholes in it.

So we went. The junior college campus was only about ten miles away and we rode over with my cousin, Kip, who's two years older than me and who's always going to shows at the campus. He had a date and all, but she didn't seem to mind me and Billy much, which is just as well because Kip's mother made him give us the ride. It's really crummy not having a driver's license.

Naturally, Billy was hyped up. He kept turning to me and saying, "What should I do when I meet her?"

I didn't feel like telling him he probably wouldn't get any closer than thirty feet to her, and that even then she'd be on stage and too busy to notice; so I just kept saying back, "Don't worry, you'll get a sign or

something," which seemed to me to be a pretty good answer considering who I was talking to.

We finally got there, got out of the car, and Kip and his girlfriend gave us the slip.

"Big crowd," I said to Billy as we bought our tickets, handed our tickets back to the man at the door, and walked in.

"Yeah, they get a good crowd sometimes on Friday," he said in a more subdued way.

"Let's get a couple of good seats while we've got the chance — we're pretty early." I didn't have to say that twice.

The front row always has some pretty good seats on it, so we headed in that direction. There was a big portable stage made out of steel and planks at one end of the coliseum floor and folding chairs were in rows all over the rest of the place. All of the tickets were general admission, so it was more or less first come, first served.

We sat down and started to wait as we found a couple of places that would let us see and hear everything that might happen -- like maybe a riot, a stabbing, or a shooting even -- and which would also probably put our young booties right in the middle of it. So far, so good.

Billy was getting excited again, "Just wait till she comes out. I won't even have to yell at her or raise my hand to get her attention, or anything. She's just going to be introduced, sing a couple of songs, and then look straight at me."

"What happens then?" I had to ask even though I hated to.

"I don't know," the question had stunned him. It was just like Billy not to plan ahead any further than making initial eye contact, "I guess I'll just play it by ear."

He didn't sound particularly worried about the procedure that he would follow to win his lady love's heart or whatever it was that he planned to do, so I decided not to worry either.

We settled down to a pretty unspectacular forty-five minute wait.

The guy who came out on stage to introduce Rana laid it on pretty thick. He told about what groups she had performed with, what records she had sung on, where a person could buy her records if they wanted any, where she was born, what her Zodiac sign was, and about a million other little things. Everything but her measurements practically. I'd never heard so much talking in an introduction for a singer before -- but I suppose the man doing the spiel could have been ape over her like Billy.

Finally, Rana Syclo came out. She was the opening act for a group called Flatlands, so Billy didn't have to sit through listening to somebody that he didn't want to hear sing before getting his rocks.

She came out and everybody sort of cheered a little, but Billy didn't say or do anything.

"Hey Billy," I said -- but he wasn't saying anything. He was just staring at her like he was trying to beam her a message in Morse code. She was up there on the stage, singing away, and Billy was down on the floor by me just beaming away. I was a little puzzled.

For the next couple of minutes I moved my eyes from Billy to Rana. I had to admit that she was a knockout. She looked exactly like she had on the album cover, too. That was definitely Billy's girl up there. She could

sing pretty good. The rhythm of her song was a little slow, like dope songs are a lot, but the kids all liked it and were kind of swaying around and starting to get into it a little bit. All of the kids, that is, except Billy. He was still just staring. I didn't say a word to him.

The second song was a lot like the first; it got the same kind of movement from the audience and all -- but Billy still wasn't reacting. All though the second number he sat and looked at the girl on the stage while I sat there alternating between watching him and watching Rana on the stage. I sure hadn't seen anything pass between them yet. She hadn't looked straight at much of anybody at all, but was more or less staring at the rafters in the coliseum. I think she was screwed up on some kind of dope.

The rest of the time she was onstage passed just about the same -- Billy staring a hole in Rana, and Rana staring a hole in the rafters. She did give both of us a start once, just before she finished her set. She looked down and over the crowd and let her eyes rest on Billy for just a second. Boy, I could see his heart jump out to the front of his chest practically, he was so startled, but then her eyes moved back up pretty fast and that's mostly where they stayed again after that. I think the only reason she even looked at Billy at all was that she was trying to get her eyes to focus and my best friend was still the only person in the crowd not moving, which made him a good target.

After Rana Syclo left the stage, we stayed and watched the Flatlands band, mostly because we knew that Kip wouldn't want to leave early and we didn't feel like hitching a ride home. So we sat through everything. Billy just kind of slumped down during the second show and didn't talk at all. I guess all that concentrating he had done had been a big strain.

We left the coliseum finally at about ten-thirty or eleven o'clock, found Kip and his date, and went home. Billy didn't say much on the ride back home either. As a matter of fact, he didn't say anything, and I didn't bother him. One of the biggest jobs a best friend has is not to bug the other half of the friendship when that other half obviously doesn't feel like being bugged. Billy was fairly obviously not in the mood to be bugged.

Anyway, like I said, I haven't seen Billy for several days now. It's not that I'm worried about his health or that he will commit suicide or anything. Billy's really a lot more stable than he looks and acts. It's just that it's going to be awfully hard helping him catch up with his school work. This is the fourth day he's missed, and a guy's best friend always has to help him catch up on missed work when he's cut school for a few days. It's really hard to get caught up sometimes.

But Billy will be okay pretty soon, I'm sure. He missed school almost this long once before last year, after one of his binges. He'd decided that he was going to build a scale model of the Washington Monument out of toothpicks as practice for becoming another Frank Lloyd Wright. He must have worked on that thing for six weeks, and it was starting to look pretty good, I have to admit, when one afternoon his cat knocked it over and chewed up all the toothpicks. It must have liked the taste of the glue. Anyway, he'll get over this eventually, just like he got over the Washington Monument.

Rana Syclo though, had better watch out, because if she's ever out in a supermarket or a dark alley late at night or something, and runs into Billy, she's going to get the hell ignored out of her.

B. S. Mikell III



Duck-Billed Platypi

In my dreams I've dreamed that I
Could own two duck-billed platypi.
I'd take them walking in the park,
Three misanthropes out on a lark,
What pets these animals would be,
They'd draw attention straight to me —
Like owning two rhinoseri
Or a matching set of octopi.
With my unlikely pets I'd stand
Apart from any other man.
Myself and my two platypi,
My duck-billed platypi and I.

B. S. Mikell III

PePaw's Pontiac

PePaw called it "that damn mule."
A dent in a new fender
Will color one's opinion
Of a misguided neuter.
As for me, I blithely planted
A crop of make believe games
Beneath the salvaged piece
Of the '54 Pontiac.
He saved that fender stubbornly
Like a battle souvenir --
A necklace made from melted shrapnel
To be worn when hating Germans.
Ah--PePaw loathed the mule
That torpedoed his new car
Ten odd years ago
When he was driving fast.
He hated it serenely,
A hate well-laced with pleasure;
And often told my mother
He was glad the mule had died.
While I, in total ignorance,
Transmuted in my play
The fender into private joys
And never damned the mule.

B. S. Mikell III

PERSERVING PATTY: OR EGADS! NOT ANOTHER FAIRY TALE

The bell which signaled the beginning of class finished its final ring as Patty slid into her seat. She tried to keep from gasping for air as she caught her breath and arranged her books for World History. Today was the day, and Patty knew that she must do everything right if she were to achieve her goal. Little did Mark Huxley (tall, dark, handsome, and money too!) know it, but if all battle strategy went according to plan, barring natural disasters, he would ask her for a date to the Parker High Prom. No aim was too distant, no price too high for this slightly pimpled, half-awake beauty in search of her prince.

While slipping out of her cardigan she managed to peek over the two rows on her left and check his usual seat. "Ah, yes!" she thought, "He's present. And people say there is no God!" He was busily sharpening his pencil by rubbing it back and forth on the inside cover of his notebook. The sight of his hands bent gracefully over his task was almost more than she could bear. Now was the time for Scheme One on the list she had scrawled in her assignment book. By squinting her eyes she could barely make out, "Sharpen pencil." Patty had thought it best to leave her glasses at home, so as to make her blue eyes more noticeable. As she made her way to the pencil sharpener, the thought occurred to her that if she squinted, Mark wouldn't be able to tell that she had eyes, much less distinguish their color. She opened her eyes as wide as possible and promptly collided with a blurred figure who was engaged in the process of emptying the sharpener into the wastepaper basket. She stepped nearer to apologize, and through a cloud of wood shavings and graphite, discovered that the person was Norval Lott. Norval was a cross between Wally Cox and Andy Hardy; ugly as a mud fence, but so All-American you had to be friendly to him.

"Oh, Patty," he blurted, "I'm so sorry. I didn't see you standing there. Here, let me sharpen your pencil." He grabbed her number two lead out of her hand and began to grind it with a flourish that was almost frightening. After whittling it to a precision point, he handed it to her, bowed over her hand, and stumbled to his seat next to her. By now, she definitely had Mark's attention, along with the thirty other people in the class, so she decided to retire to her place before Norval hopped back up for an encore.

Patty had just enough time for a quick glance at her assignment book before Ms. Givens began her daily lecture. Checkpoint Two was "Sound intelligent." For Patty, this was going to be a hard one. History was not her favorite subject and Ms. Givens had a voice like a chainsaw performing in the key of F. After five minutes of careful concentration she

was rewarded by being asked to answer a question. She began to mumble frantically while trying to remember the exact date of the Dred Scott decision, when Norval gave the answer in his frog-like voice. Patty slumped in her seat, wiped the cold sweat from her brow, and waited to give the next question a try. Mark had glanced her way, and was now balancing his pencil on his left forefinger, while the girls around him batted their eyes in admiration of his feat.

"Miss Spencer, would you please answer the question?" Ms. Givens' voice broke through Patty's thoughts like a freight train and jarred her into quick mental action. Question? What question? What was the question? "To be or not to be" flashed into her mind and popped out before she could stop it. She cringed with embarrassment while the class snickered and Ms. Givens lectured on the values of paying attention and the hazards of no-so-smart answers. Only Norval gave her a look of sympathy, which only made matters worse. To heck with sounding intelligent! She would move on to Checkpoint Three, which read, "Glow, sparkle, radiate personality; and if all else fails, trip him!"

Mark was by now gazing around the room with that slightly bored air she had come to know and love. As his glance passed over her, she smiled and lowered one eyelid in what she prayed was a sensuous wink. He looked at her as if slightly puzzled and continued his visual exercises. Patty was desperately trying to lean into his line of vision, when the bell rang to end class. Trip him she must, and trip him she would, but first she had to make it out the door before he did. Murmuring apologies as she went, Patty pushed and scrambled her way to the door and stepped outside the classroom. She squinted her eyes, and searched the room for his familiar form. He was walking towards her, with a smile on his face, coming closer and closer, like a commercial for Clairol.

"Excuse me." Patty tore her eyes away from Mark and looked at Norval, who was standing by the lockers. He cleared his throat and said, "If you aren't doing anything tomorrow night, would you like to go to the prom?"

Shock spread over her in a wave as she put a hand on the doorfacing to steady herself. Norval Lott was actually asking her to the prom. How could he even think of such a thing? Hadn't he read her script? Didn't he know who was supposed to ask her to the prom? As this passed through her brain, she turned in time to see Mark (that ever-appealing vision of loveliness) heading down the hall. He was flipping a coin into the air and catching it as a horde of giggling girls followed close behind. She turned back to Norval who was patiently waiting for an answer. In the dim light of the hall, he didn't look quite so bad. Perhaps the bright classroom lights reflecting off his glasses were what made him look so much like a toad. Patty tilted her head, and opened her eyes wide.

"Sure, I'd love to," she answered. Keeping her eyes open and smiling, she turned and promptly walked into a locker.

Randi Crawford

The French Book

Today in the library
I took from high in the shelves -
Too high, really, for me to reach unassisted--
A book written in French completely;
Even the title being in French.
And because I couldn't read it,
I opened it,
Scanned the pages with blinded,
Or more accurately, ignorant eyes,
And saw only a single French word,
"Avec,"
Meaning "with,"
That I knew.
I laughed at myself for knowing only a single word in
an entire book.
But then, hidden in the scramble of the French ink
on the white paper,
I perceived an image of trees falling silently
in a deserted forest.
The trees and the French words were falling--
intermingling--crashing down together;
Neither making any sound
While simultaneously rendering me useless.
Gradually I found myself wondering
How anyone could understand this French
And not be able to understand English just as well.
I thought about all the things that unreadable
pages bring to mind.
A French book in my American hands--
Feeling calm, unmoved, on my calloused palms.
I handled the book for most of the morning
In lieu of reading it.
Later, after the book was returned to its place
High in the shelves
I remembered the word, "avec," that I had known
And smiled
Because I'm sure that I heard faintly a sound--
Like a tree crashing earthward--
Somewhere in the distance.

B. S. Mikell III

MAGNOLIAS AND MOCKING BIRDS

List of Characters
Mary Jane Simmons
Priscilla Simmons
Jim Chamblee

+Jim is a man of 55. He is tall, grey and very well dressed.

A Play Of One Act and One Scene

A Friday afternoon in October, 1976, the southern town of Glenddale, the living room of the Simmons sisters.

SCENE: The living-room of the Simmons' house. A large front door is down-stage C. Stage L. is a door leading to Priscilla's bedroom. Stage R. is a door leading to the kitchen. Down stage L. is a round table and three chairs. Down stage R. is a desk. Up L. is a buffet with a silver service on it. Up R. is a huge bookshelf. In C. of the room before the front door, a couch and chair with two matching tables of appropriate size on either side. Paintings symbolic of the old south are hung on the walls.

AT RISE: Priscilla Simmons, a vibrant and beautiful woman of 53, enters from stage L. wearing a sleek black dress tailored to fit the fashion of the day. Her hair is cut in a short blow-dry style, and it is salt-and-pepper colored. Mary Jane Simmons, an old and motherly woman of 52, is seated on the couch reading a paper. Her hair short, teased and clairol black. Her clothes were out-dated twenty years ago.

(All stage directions are from the actor's positions on-stage.)

PRISCILLA. Have you seen my black and grey scarf? (Walks to C. and looks for scarf around chair and sofa.)

MARY. No, and if you have one more drink you'll never find it. (Never looks up.)

PRISCILLA. All right Mama, why are you so bent out of shape? You haven't spoken to me since you got home, and that's been nearly thirty minutes. Either you're mad at me, or you had a little run-in with Inez down at the library today. (Can't find scarf. Exits stage L.)

MARY. (Talking loudly.) I'm not mad, or as you so crudely put it, bent out of shape, and next of all; I'm not your mother! (Priscilla enters stage L. Walks to C. Sits in chair beside sofa.) If you remember, Miss Priscilla, (Mary notices Priscilla, begins speaking lower.) you are eleven months and three days older than I. (Resumes looking into paper.)

PRISCILLA. (Stands, exits R. stage. Leaves door open.) I call you Mama because Ed and Liz called you Mama.

MARY. (Louder, sharply.) Well, I raised them, so I don't mind. (Tenderly.) Besides, they were both just babies when Mama died. Little Edwin wasn't even walking.

PRISCILLA. (Enters from R. stage, drink in one hand, scarf in other. Moves to C., sits in chair beside sofa.) Little Edwin, my ass. (Sharply, slowly.) He's one of the biggest bastards who ever set foot on the sidewalks of Glenddale, and you know it. He's never been anything but Hell on wheels. (Priscilla drinks from glass.)

MARY. (Angrily.) He is not, and you better hush. (Puts paper aside.)

Points at Priscilla's glass.) You'll be using God's name in vain before long.

PRISCILLA. Well, it wouldn't be the first time. (Drinks.)

MARY. (Slowly.) I know that, (Intently.) but at your age you should be repenting and not making the ruts of sin you've lived in your whole life deeper. (Picks paper up again.)

PRISCILLA. I haven't lived my whole life yet, darlin'. I still have a few good years left in me. (Places scarf on side table.)

MARY. (Lets paper fall to lap, looks upward.) Lord, forgive her; she knows not what she says or does. She's under the influence of liquor, filthy books and . . .

PRISCILLA. (Interrupting sarcastically.) Bar the doors, Satie; she's praying. (Remembering what Mary has said.) And what do you mean filthy books?

MARY. (Crosses down stage R. and picks up magazine from desk.) I got those books in today that you had me order especially for you. (Crosses back to couch and sits.) Why, you should be ashamed! (Tensely.) Mr. Thrash, that nice young postman, brought them in while I was on my afternoon break. I was down in the sheriff's office having coffee with Inez; and Debbie, that little high school girl who works with me in the afternoons, thought she could do a little something constructive while I was gone, so she unpacked the books. When I got back, that innocent little child had her head buried in those awful things. (Repremandingly.) It isn't enough that you would really read those filthy things, but to order them through me, and take the chance of letting them fall into some innocent young person's hands. (Trying to shame Priscilla.) It's out and out sin, Priscilla! It's out and out sin!

PRISCILLA. (Laughing) So that's what you're so bent over about. (Now being serious) Did they all come?

MARY. (Shrilly) Oh Lord, is that all you can say? (Mockingly) Did they all come?

PRISCILLA. Well, did they? (Drinks)

MARY. Yes, I checked the list to make sure, (Loudly) because if they hadn't I was going to cancel the order. I can promise you that. (Puts magazine aside) The very idea having such trash in my library. When I ordered them I didn't know what they were about, and you know it. (Quickly) For all I knew *Once Is Not Enough* could have been something pertaining to medicine.

PRISCILLA. (Sarcastically, serious.) Is it not?

MARY. (Loudly.) You know it's not. (Picks up magazine and pretends to thumb through it. Speaks lowly.) It's about some lustful woman.

PRISCILLA. (Hateful.) Oh, stop it! Those books are nothing but modern literature. (Places drink on table then exits L. stage leaving door open.)

MARY. Literature! (Excitedly.)

PRISCILLA. (From off stage.) Yes, literature. Just because you're stuck on Hepzibah Pyncheon doesn't mean that I have to be . . . I've crossed over.

MARY. (Loudly.) And what does that mean?

PRISCILLA. (Enters L. stage, with nail polish in hand, crosses C. to

chair beside sofa and sits.) Nothing . . . By the way, where are the books? (Begins painting nails).

MARY. (Strongly.) I hid them!

PRISCILLA. Hid them?

MARY. (Nervous.) Yes, I thought about locking them up in the cabinet where I keep the over-due book money, but I couldn't take the chance of letting Debbie get a hold of them again, and if Inez ever came up to the library and saw them, I would be ruined. So, I brought them home and hid them over there in the top shelf of the bookcase behind the decent books!

PRISCILLA. (Reassuring.) Don't worry about it. That little girl didn't know they were mine, so no gossip will get started on me.

MARY. Your mind must be slipping. (Sarcastically) Don't you remember signing the order slip? I'm practically sure she saw your name on it.

PRISCILLA. (Thinks). Well, I guess she'll see me in a different light tonight.

MARY. (Putting magazine aside.) What do you mean?

PRISCILLA. (Slowly). Debbie and one of Charles Wydell's sons come to the show every Friday night. (Stops painting nails, takes drink and resumes painting nails.) I don't know which one of the boys. All four of them look alike to me. Anyway, I see them at the ticket booth and concession counter. She always asks me about you. She acts so sweet and innocent; but let me tell you, that little girl should be an actress. I bet she couldn't tell you what a single show has been about for the last two years.

MARY. (Seriously.) I've been telling her she should get her eyes checked.

PRISCILLA. (Amazed.) It's not her eyes that keep her from seeing the show. It's that little Wydell boy.

MARY. (Thinking, then realizing Priscilla's meaning.) You mean they . .

PRISCILLA. Yes.

MARY. (Shrilly.) But she's just a child.

PRISCILLA. She's seventeen. At least.

MARY. That's what I said. She's just a child.

PRISCILLA. (Quickly.) She hasn't been acting like one for at least two years.

MARY. (Shocked.) Why haven't you told her mother?

PRISCILLA. What!

MARY. (Embarrassed.) She should know if her daughter is acting in an . . . unfit manner.

PRISCILLA. (Blandly.) In your eyes every kid in town over fourteen probably acts in an unfit manner. (Stops painting nails and picks up drink.)

MARY. (Shocked.) You mean to tell me that you let those . . . children sit in there and . . . carry on like that!

PRISCILLA. Since when is a little smooching and hand-holding so bad? (Takes last swallow of drink. Exits stage R. with glass in hand.)

(Both stage L. and stage R. doors remain open for the rest of the play.)-

MARY. (Looking upwards.) Oh Lord God, why? It's not enough that the children of today are going to the dogs, but why does my sister, my own

flesh and blood, have to provide them with a place to start on the road to sin and iniquity? Jesus . . . forgive her because she . . .

PRISCILLA. (Enters stage R. with refilled glass in hand. Interrupting.)

Would you please stop praying?

MARY. (Shakes head from side to side, not looking up.) You'd be a lot better off you pr . . . (Looking up and seeing glass) No wonder you're hollering "stop praying!" (Slowly, tensely) Priscilla, you're drinking entirely too much. I've known that you drink for years, but you never used to bring it in the house when Papa was alive. I know you used to keep it in your car in the glove compartment, but it's different now. You're getting open with the whole thing. Papa hasn't been dead but nine months, and if you keep going, the Lord only knows what you'll be like in another nine months. I can't sit by and see you put a blemish on the good name of Simmons . . . and the only thing I know to do is demand that you stop . . . defiling this house with liquor.

PRISCILLA. (Very slowly with meaning.) Daddy left this house to me, and I'll bring anything into it I want to.

MARY. He left the furnishings to me, though, and I have a right to say what they are, and liquor is not . . . I repeat, is not, one of them! (Picks magazine back up and begins thumbing through it nervously.)

PRISCILLA. I do keep it out of sight. It's not as if I had a full bar set up for the world to see. (Drinks.)

MARY. (Slams magazine down on couch.) No, it isn't, but you could have the decency to hide it in your room and not in the kitchen cabinet over the stove. (Fold arms in disgust.)

PRISCILLA. How did you know it was up there? (Takes another drink. She's feeling liquor now.)

MARY. (Slyly) I found a bottle of some vile smelling something or other up there Tuesday, and I just knew it was liquor; so, I poured it out. (All-knowingly) You may keep it in pepper sauce decanters, but you're not fooling me.

PRISCILLA. Well, thank God for that! (Relieved)

MARY. (Sharply) You should get on your knees and thank Him for having me to keep you from sinking so far into sin!

PRISCILLA. That's not why I was thanking Him. I thought I had gotten a little too tipsy and had not remembered drinking all of it, or . . . (using a kidding voice) there was the possibility that you were nipping . . . again.

MARY. (Loudly) I knew that was coming . . . I knew it. Every time I get on to you about something, you never fail to bring that up.

PRISCILLA. I do not, and (Laughing) it did happen.

MARY. (Tensely) Thirty years ago it happened, and only once. Besides, I've told you time after time that I didn't know I was drinking liquor. I thought it was fruit punch.

PRISCILLA. (Still laughing) Maybe so, but you were the happiest Goddamn drunk I've ever seen.

MARY. (Mad) There you go . . . using the Lord's name in vain!

PRISCILLA. It just slipped. I'll try and not do it again. I simply forgot about your virgin ears.

MARY. (Loudly) Stop talking filthy! I'm not going to tell you again!

PRISCILLA. OK . . . OK, all jokes aside. You'll have to admit that it was a funny sight seeing you crawl through the bedroom window, and Lord help us all, you were giggling. (Laughs loudly.)

MARY. (Sharply.) I never will believe I giggled like you say . . . You always have exaggerated the whole thing.

PRISCILLA. (Still laughing.) Your hair was torn down and you had taken your dress off and thrown it over your shoulder so you wouldn't tear it on the rosebushes in front of the window . . .

MARY. (Interrupting loudly.) I never took my dress off!

PRISCILLA. (Quickly.) You most certainly did, and when you got in the window, Inez Ingram threw your shoes in, and you two talked for the longest about what fun you had had.

MARY. (Embarrassed.) Would you please hush? It was not as . . . lewd as you make it sound. We had just been out to the country club for the Fourth of July dance. Neither of us knew that punch was made out of liquor. I've told you and I've told you that the whole incident was as innocent as could be.

PRISCILLA. Maybe so, but honey, you sure enjoyed that one fling. (Drinks.)

MARY. I did not. The only thing I really remember like you tell it was being sick afterwards.

PRISCILLA. I had to carry you to the toilet four times.

MARY. (Loudly.) Watch your language, Priscilla!

PRISCILLA. I finally had to get a waste paper can and put it by your bed.

MARY. (Hatefully.) Jim Chamblee should still be shot.

PRISCILLA. (Puzzled.) For what? (Takes another drink, finishing it.) -

MARY. For giving me so much punch.

PRISCILLA. (Surprised.) You've never mentioned Jim before. What about him and that night?

MARY. (Embarrassed.) Oh, nothing, he was just the one who kept refilling mine and Inez's glasses.

PRISCILLA. Oh!

MARY. (Loudly.) And just what do you mean by OH? I've told you that it was all an innocent affair.

PRISCILLA. AFFAIR. (Slams glass on table beside her.)

MARY. Would you get your mind out of the ruts of sin and quit thinking vulgar! You know very well what I meant.

PRISCILLA. Yes, I know . . . I know. (Thinks) We've got to have some supper.

MARY. I have a pork roast in the oven. It should be ready after a while.

PRISCILLA. I don't smell it cooking.

MARY. (Sarcastically.) Well, it's no wonder, you're saturated with liquor.

PRISCILLA. I'm not even close to being saturated, Mama.

MARY. (Loudly.) I'm not your mother. (Tenderly) I may be little Edwin's and Elizabeth's, but I'm not yours. No one would accuse me of that. They've both turned out to be upright and responsible people.

PRISCILLA. Shit! (At this she grabs scarf from table and begins tying it around neck.)

MARY. If you continue to use that language in front of me, I'm going to have to leave the room.

PRISCILLA. (Mad, Disgusted.) Forgive me, (Still fidgeting with scarf.) but you're disgusting. Little Edwin upright . . . Liz responsible.

MARY. Well, they are!

PRISCILLA. Mary Jane, you know that Liz is as scattered as they come. She can't even remember to wear her glasses, and she's blind without them. She walks around half the time and can't see a damn thing, and before you say anything about my cursing; I repent.

MARY. I accept your apology . . . but I still don't like to hear such language in this house. Papa may have used a little of it, but that was different; he was a man . . . And you shouldn't be so critical of Elizabeth.

PRISCILLA. I know it, but she makes me so nervous walking around blind chasing three kids. (Leaning back in chair and crossing legs.) I love her because she's my sister, but just being around her makes me want to climb a wall. (Begins rubbing arms nervously) and I'm not the only one. Every time she and those three kids came into this house, Daddy went for a walk.

MARY. (Defensively.) He was just old and naturally nervous all the time.

(A short pause while she thinks. Begins sadly.) But he always did favor little Edwin and you.

PRISCILLA. (Lights cigarette. Cigarette box and lighter are on table beside chair.) Daddy and Ed were close, but they had a right to be. They were just alike.

MARY. They were not. You look more like Papa than any of us. (Pause.) Remember, don't blow that smoke towards me.

PRISCILLA. I think I lost you with that one. (Laughing.) I'm starving, isn't that roast ready? (Sitting up on edge of chair.)

MARY. No, it hasn't been in the oven nearly long enough.

PRISCILLA. Well, I can't wait . . . (Stands) I think I'm going to make me a chicken salad sandwich or something. Besides, I really don't feel like pork roast. (Picks up glass. Exits stage R.)

MARY. (Crosses down R. to desk.) You really should wait for the roast.

PRISCILLA. (loudly from off stage.) I'd rather have a sandwich. Anyway, I need to watch my weight.

MARY. (Lowly, not wanting to be heard.) It's not as fattening as all that liquor. (Picks up a new magazine from desk.)

PRISCILLA. (Loudly from off stage) What did you say?

MARY. Oh, nothing.

PRISCILLA. (Enters stage R. with a refilled glass. Sits on couch.) I decided not to have that sandwich. I think I'll eat a hot dog or something from the concession stand at work. I haven't done that in a long time. Oh, I meant to ask you . . . Did Jim come by the sheriff's office today?

MARY. How should I know? (Crosses to C and sits in chair beside sofa. Sees newly refilled glass in Priscilla's hand.) If you finish that one you'll get a ticket for drunk driving, too! Then everybody will know you drink, and the whole family will suffer the embarrassment of it . . . I'm so glad Papa isn't here to see you like this.

PRISCILLA. What did you mean by saying drunk driving, too?

MARY. Well, Jim got one, didn't he?

PRISCILLA. And how do you know?

MARY. (pretending to be deeply engrossed in her new magazine.) Inez told me.

PRISCILLA. I thought you said he didn't come by the sheriff's office today.

MARY. He didn't. It was yesterday.

PRISCILLA. I swear. You and Inez are the biggest gossips. Two old-maids working in the court house is more than this county can stand.

MARY. We are not gossips. Gossiping is spreading false rumors. What we discuss are facts.

PRISCILLA. Well, tell me what Inez said about him comin' in.

MARY. She just said that Jim Chamble came into the office and that the sheriff wasn't there. So she took the money for a ticket from Jim and gave him a receipt for it. (Slight pause) Why was Jim drunk at 2:53 on a Sunday afternoon?

PRISCILLA. He had been out fishing with some of the men from the country club. I think Ed was in the bunch. (Thinks) How did you know it was 2:53 on a Sunday afternoon?

MARY. (Defensively.) Well, the ticket had the time and date on it.

PRISCILLA. And I suppose you even saw the ticket. (Drinks)

MARY. No, I did not see the ticket. And I can't help it if Inez tells me everything.

PRISCILLA. You two don't gossip . . . huh?

MARY. (Quickly.) It's all fact and you know it. (Sarcastically) At least you should know it as much as you've been seeing him lately. I hope you know that that man is going to give you a bad name.

PRISCILLA. That's ridiculous. (Drinks) He's a highly respected man.

MARY. Well, he may be a lawyer, and from what I hear, he and Edwin are pretty good friends . . . but then again, they have to get along if they're going to be partners . . . (hatefully) but he is divorced.

PRISCILLA. What is so bad about being divorced?

MARY. (Preacher like) In the eyes of God he's still married. The vows he took were "till death do we part," weren't they?

PRISCILLA. There are exceptions to the rule, and adultery is one of them. You know very well that Kathrine ran off with that man from Florida last year. (Drinks)

MARY. (Relentlessly.) In the eyes of God you're courting a married man.

PRISCILLA. I really could care less right now. (Drinks) As far as I'm concerned, Jim is an eligible man. But you don't have to worry . . . We had a fight Monday, and I haven't heard from him since. (Slips shoes off. Removes paper and magazine from couch, puts them on floor. Lies down on couch.)

MARY. Good, maybe now you can find some nice bachelor.

PRISCILLA. The only bachelors in this town are twenty or twenty-five years younger than me. I'm afraid they're not hunting what I am . . . right now.

MARY. All of them aren't. Lucas McNair is about our age, and he isn't married.

PRISCILLA. Good God. Lucas McNair. I wouldn't be seen with that man for the love or money. (Leans up, Drinks).

MARY. And why not? He's very nice.

PRISCILLA. Well, you can have him; but as for me, I think there is something wrong with a man who hunts up the funeral home and talks to the mortician every time he goes into a new town. I'm staying away from him.

MARY. Well, you better stay away from Jim Chamblee, too. Papa always said that he had a bad eye for a low fence.

PRISCILLA. I don't care what kind of an eye he's got. I'm going to stick it out with him . . . if he'll let me.

MARY. You're sinning if you do.

PRISCILLA. I said I really could care less right now. (Leans up, Drinks.)

MARY. It's dangerous to talk like that. If you didn't have all that liquor in you, you'd have more reverence for God.

PRISCILLA. I'm not even tipsy, but I'd probably feel better if I was. It gets awfully tiring. . . just sitting in that ticket booth every night . . . watching those kids have a good time. When I have a couple of drinks, the night just seems to go by quicker.

MARY. Well, you don't have to work there. You could hire someone else to do that.

PRISCILLA. Then what would I do? Sit there and twiddle my thumbs, because I sure couldn't stay home. Besides, I think if I quit working, half the kids wouldn't come anymore.

MARY. Why do you say that?

PRISCILLA. Because I provide half the entertainment. (Leans up and finishes drink. Places empty glass on the floor.)

MARY. How?

PRISCILLA. Oh, I act hateful when I'm selling the tickets. Then I get aggravated when they come and buy one thing at a time. About this time I begin talking mean to them, and they never fail to fuss back. Kids like to have something to gripe about . . . I used to walk down the aisles with a flashlight shining it on the people that were smooching until some little bastard hit me in the head with a cup about five years ago. So now I stand at the back and pick out some couple and spotlight them. I always pick out some new couple to do it to . . . It's kind of the initiation into the circle of Priscilla's Palace. (Doorbell rings. Mary Jane crosses down C. to answer it.) The kids don't even know that I know they call the place Priscilla's Palace.

MARY. Hello, Jim. Come on in. (Suddenly Priscilla looks lucid. Pushes glass under sofa. Begins straightening scarf and hair.)

JIM. Thank you, Miss Mary . . . Say, we're having a dance out at the country club Saturday night. Bet you'd like to come. (Winks.)

MARY. (Blushes, embarrassed.) Well, no . . . I, ah, don't think so.

JIM. Is Priscilla here?

MARY. (Very coolly.) Yes, but I'm afraid she's soon got to go to work.

JIM. Good. (Walks in.)

PRISCILLA. What's so good about it? (Rises, props elbows on back of sofa. Knees on the cushion of the sofa. Back to the audience.) Don't you

want to see me? (Mary now crosses C. and sits in same chair as before.)
JIM. Yes, I sure . . . do! (Crosses C. to back of sofa. Facing her.) I thought maybe we could go to supper or something, and then I could drop you off at work. I tried to call you before, but no one answered.

PRISCILLA. What time?

JIM. About 4:30.

PRISCILLA. I was out shopping then. (Turns around on couch. Searches for shoes and slips them on.) I've been depressed lately and I figured a new dress would lighten my spirits, but it didn't . . . This is the dress I bought. (Rises, Crosses stage L. to end of couch.) Do you like it?

JIM. Yes, I thought that was new. (Crosses stage R. to end of sofa.)

PRISCILLA. Never mind about the new . . . Do you like it?

JIM. I sure do. By the way, you haven't said if you'll have supper with me or not . . . I think you better.

PRISCILLA. (Light-heartedly.) Is that a threat or something?

JIM. (Seriously.) No, it's just my way of trying to say that we have something to talk about.

MARY. (Hopefully.) You two could stay here. I've got a nice pork roast in the oven.

JIM. (Never taking eyes off Priscilla.) No, thank you, Miss Mary. If Priscilla is going to have supper with me tonight, I think it better be alone. We don't have a lot of time left.

PRISCILLA. (Very Quickly.) Just let me get my purse. (Exits stage L.) -

JIM. You better hurry. (Crossing stage L. in front of couch.) We're not getting any younger.

PRISCILLA. (Laughs.) Who says? (Enters stage L. Moves toward back C. to door. Jim follows her.) Listen, Mary Jane, I'll see you later. (Opens door.)

JIM. Listen, Miss Mary, don't forget about Saturday night. We can have dinner too.

MARY. (Crosses down C. Facing Priscilla.) Be careful. (She kisses Priscilla on the cheek.)

PRISCILLA. Don't worry about me, Mama. (Priscilla and Jim exit C.) (Mary Jane very slowly and sadly walks around the room picking papers and magazines off the floor. She carries them down stage R. to desk. Then she makes another round getting empty glass off floor and nail polish off end table. She crosses down stage L. and places these on table. Crosses to C. and sits on couch for a second while closely surveying the room. Phone rings and Mary answers it. Phone is beside sofa on adjoining table.)

MARY. Hello, Inez . . . Yes, I'm all right . . . I didn't call this afternoon because I was so busy . . . No, she's not here . . . Oh, she went out for supper tonight . . . No, Jim Chamblee is with her . . . I don't know, Inez, that's none of my business. I don't ask Priscilla personal questions . . . Who? . . . He did . . . Well, how bad was the wreck? . . . My . . . My . . . When's his funeral? . . . We could go in my car . . . You did say Sunday afternoon . . . How old was he, Inez? . . . Thirty-two! That's so young . . . He is . . . Well he was just by to pick up Priscilla, and he didn't say anything to me about being a pall-bearer . . . Of course Jim and I talk

when he comes over . . . Just about general things, but he didn't tell me he was going to be a pall-bearer in Clyde's funeral . . . He is not . . . Inez, Jim is just the victim of idle gossip, that's all. You know, he's actually a very nice man. Yes . . . He and Priscilla invited me out to the country club for supper Saturday night . . . No, I didn't know they were having a dance too . . . Well, I'm sure we'll have supper and come back here . . . Yes, I'm going Inez. You know I'm not crazy about eating alone all of the time . . . I remember the last time, but that was thirty years ago . . . I will not. Once is enough for something like that . . . Me too . . . Tell your mother I hope she's feeling better . . . Sunday afternoon at two . . . Ok . . . bye.

(Mary sits on the sofa looking very sad. Suddenly, an unusual light appears in her eyes. She rises and begins humming. She begins taking a few rather remedial dance steps. She stops.)

MARY. Now, how did that go? (She begins dancing again. Getting more lively all of the time. When she finishes she is standing up R. by the bookshelf. She looks at the bookshelf very strangely . . . She speaks.) Was it . . . Was Once Enough? (At this, she reaches behind the books for the copy of *Once Is Not Enough*. After retrieving the book, she turns and walks to the sofa. As she opens the book and begins to sit on the sofa, there is a complete blackout.)

William C. Williams, Jr.

ARTIST'S ROOM

The door stands open, an invitation to enter, to gaze at the work of many hours and much thought. Weak gray winter light filtering through the louvered shutters falls on a paint-speckled floor and softly illuminates an artist's isolated niche.

Smells of oil, turpentine and Gesso repel, causing a sharp intake of breath; yet they are essential to the atmosphere. The eye sees order and chaos together. On the paneled wall is the proud display, neat rows of framed masterpieces. Underneath this show of color is an easel and work table. The palette, a splash of color more fantastic than any rainbow, sits ready on the stool. The easel, its stiff aluminum legs daubed by brush strokes that exceeded a painting, holds a canvas showing the first strokes of another subject, the prelude to the unleashing of creative forces. On the small work table sits a metal box within which, for just one person in the world, there is order within disorder: brushes of every size and shape, tubes of paint—old, new and in-between, rags splotched with oil and paint, bottles of retouch varnish and painting medium. These are the tools of the trade. These are the keys to a very personal happiness.

Everything here is personal, is perfect. The unspoken word here is "Private." But the door stands open, an invitation to enter, to gaze at the work of many hours and much thought—but not to stay.

Claire Williamson



