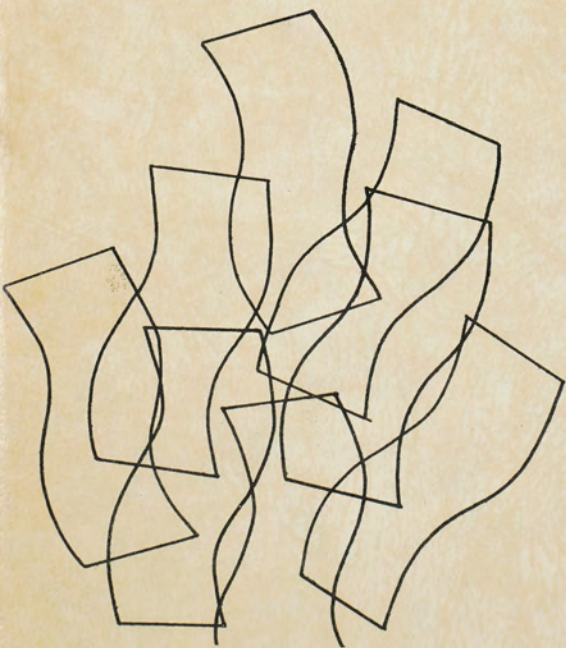
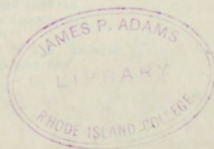


**hydra**



"I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered  
virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never  
sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks  
out of the race...If there is danger of infection,  
it is to be found amply in holy writings also.  
Wisdom comes from the comparison of ideas."

-John Milton



#### NIHIL OBSTAT

It has long interested me that so much is said these days about responsibility to those who exercise freedom while so little is said about responsibility to those who exercise authority. The dissenters of our Viet Nam policy are charged with being, among other things, irresponsible. In fact, there is a sophisticated effort at present to show that the dissenters against war are prolonging the war. Authority has always enjoyed the protection of law and the sanction of prevailing opinion. New ideas and new dimensions of freedom arise from minorities before they become generally accepted. When law and opinion change, the authorities become villains and the dissenters heroes. The precise point at which this transition takes place is never clear.

Hegel was probably right when he equated Being with Freedom. To Be is to be free. To be restrained is not To Be -- or at most, only partly To Be. To threaten man's freedom is to threaten his Being. The willingness to risk even the abuse of freedom must be the distinguishing mark of a free society. Truth -- like responsibility -- is impossible without freedom. The most outrageous idea in history is the idea of freedom.

-Kenneth Lewalski

#### twister

there's a time when the wind  
suddenly sighs  
then lifts and cries  
against whatever leans into it  
wrapping a roaring circle  
about the bewildered intruder  
gasping  
and  
groping for breath  
and the will to stand set  
amid gusts that torture  
that pull life from within  
to satisfy pained shrills  
wailing high in clouds  
a wind gone mad  
shouting echoes of its madness  
through a frightened sky

-Kenneth Hoxie

# THE THIRD RAIL

the bell thumped like a bandaged hammer  
and the rope on which he danced  
splintered in a belfry of ancient wood.

he travelled through the lace curtain rain of  
a thousand dawns on a slipstream of total need -  
into the fetid parks with their cinderella  
toilet barons and hungry hessian policewomen.

he saw the black-jack alleys choking with nickel  
and dime lovers who tinkered with one another  
and bugged the glass slithered executives.

he saw the coffee-break patrolman stroking  
his excitable sidearm and fantasizing about  
his free fall daughter

he watched the catchpenny library theives  
tolling through the age crisped tomes by day  
and coddling their sexless dolls at night.

from his rexall retreat he saw night fire-up  
the queens of camouflage - the gaboling  
metamorphic marines who eagerly traded  
helmets for hair pieces and fatigues for  
gowns of mandarin silk.

he saw his burning monkey and halloween ghost  
gagging on handfuls of green candy and  
staring at the draining hourglass.

and that night he slept on the third rail  
his cold gold arm malleable andasty anchored  
by 50,000 volts of incendiary current.

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the final pallet for a prophet of  
tormented tomorrows.

-Norman Hindley

you are  
not like  
and  
metaphor  
falls  
numbers  
cannot  
and so  
you are  
and I  
marvel

and so you are  
and I marvel  
-Pamela Roberts



MADONNA WITHOUT CHILD

Venus rises  
amid calm seas  
and oyster shells.  
Her hair is long  
and flowing  
and golden.  
Her skin is soft snow  
and bright eyes laugh  
while  
somewhere  
chilly cherubs moan.

Venus rises  
amid plastered walls  
and dirty floors.  
With curlers in her hair  
and pimples on her face  
She stares nearsighted  
while new-born babies  
wail in the night  
with diaper rash.

"The poet paints what he feels"  
irritating the darkness  
behind the cornea  
of his eye.  
With the flowers  
of the naked  
mad Italian  
or  
the jet-black brush  
of ugly virgins  
stooping to piss  
among trashcans,  
the poem somehow  
bends the light  
dissecting darkness.  
And what remains  
remains as truth  
and beauty;  
the fatal  
fragile symmetry  
of snowflakes dancing  
in the uric glow  
of street lights moaning  
when winter  
fornicates  
with sterile sidewalks.  
(Fool, do such thoughts really matter?)

Venus rises  
to make apeline  
for an apple  
the greasy greek  
the toy trojan.

Venus rises  
to swallow  
the sperm  
of sly salesmen  
and shapely sailors  
searching  
for the tattooed lady,  
the pornographic peacock,  
a madonna  
without child.

-John Symynkywicz

THE FRUSTRATION OF SEEKING A NEW WAY  
TO WRITE ABOUT WHAT ALWAYS WAS

or

Black Sambo, Revisited

Verily, verily in a merry poem  
We'll catch a nigger by the toe  
(In 1965? In Bogalusa or Alabama -  
Alley-bah-mah?)  
But we'll let him go, Man,  
Just as in the old ditty.

Recall that the tigers turned into butter  
Into waterfalls of it over Black Sambo's grits  
Over his hominy, all in a yellow harmony.

Sunny Sambo plucked his banjo blue  
To jig out this new marvel in an old song.

Tigers turning into butter!  
Those four strings, plucked frantic,  
Could only tinkle and jangle some hint  
Of his gratitude.

How to write it out without even one string?

Answer: Walking is an old method  
But it does get you there.

Banjoes up to Sambo and to all  
His plucky little fingers!

-Nancy Sullivan

AFTER THE BOMB, 1.

Over. Morning erupts.  
Light Light Light Light  
Dizzying pops of bulbs of dazzle.  
Turner painted this city.

He knew before they did  
What it was like.

His Venice trailed off  
(Faint cardiograph at the horizon)  
Next to the churning  
Splinters of sun, Light, atom  
In whirling bursts & shafts & rays & accordians  
& fans of Fire Fire Fire

AFTER THE BOMB, 2.

The bones stick up.  
Bones but not bones,  
Buildings in bone shapes  
Knarled and arthritic shafts  
Once hostels to the real bones.

How quiet it is  
As in cities on Sundays.

There must be something  
There must be, there must, there.  
The grey wind carries the grey ashes  
No place. There are no places.

Because my eyes cannot  
my hands cry to you  
as I shiver in my corner  
counting days like unstrung beads

I have a vision every night. Let me tell you:  
at the cloud-tickling top of a Sequoia I'm perched -  
magnificent mocking bird I watch me on pavement  
with ink pad feet and the dots lead to this  
corner. I giggle; I know it and I laugh because  
I giggled, so I wake giggling in my mind  
and laughing outright until my eyes focus and  
I see the sorcerer stepping on my night-light  
shadow.

I cannot justify  
even the stick-stone torment  
of my little days  
not then  
not now  
not in all the Humpty Dumpty tomorrows  
my hands cry for you  
because my voice cannot

And night is worst. And I watch outside  
the manic moths in vortex lights and I think  
of sunrise and I giggle. And I hear the floor  
crack darkly.

I can quantify,  
Can examine.  
Can count blades of grass.  
Can consider journeys  
Can sit stone still  
I can not crush  
one blade  
neath one step.  
I can know where  
I've nowhere  
to go where  
that is that important because  
my eyes cannot --  
my hands cry to you  
as I shiver in my corner  
counting days like unstrung beads.

-Carmine Sarracino

-Nancy Sullivan

UNDER THE GARISH MOUNTAIN

In the madness of morning sun  
on whitened walls,  
the devout clutter the square;  
and the fountains  
of water-shocked stone watch the sky.

Their restless water fragments vision  
and cools the grubby hands  
of Tantalus' bastard child; he petitions  
one whose anxious faith  
shrouds her impious arms in blue-gold scarf.

She shrugs her clinging scarf and loses him.  
Child, had she smiled  
I had forgotten you, in the Roman  
glare of sun  
and water, and Michaelangelo.

-Molly Matfield

# ARGUMENT

I'll Argue That      The Way  
                         To Live  
                         Is Life  
                         Through Death  
                         So Life  
                         Can  
                         Live  
                         No Deathly  
                         Life

Unless Of Course That      God  
                         And Death  
                         Are  
                         Dead  
                         And  
                         Life  
                         Can Live  
                         No  
                         Life

But If?                      Death Dies  
                         Who  
                         Lives  
                         To Die  
                         And How  
                         Can God  
                         Still  
                         Live To  
                         Die  
                         Death's Death

And If?                      God Dies  
                         Who  
                         Dies  
                         To Live  
                         And How  
                         Can Death  
                         Still  
                         Die To  
                         Live Life's  
                         Life

Or Must It Be?              That God  
                         And Death  
                         Both Live  
                         And Die  
                         That  
                         Death  
                         And God  
                         Both Die  
                         And Live

and if I could care about the old men who feed pigeons at noon  
and cry into their empty bottles at dawn then I too  
would speak in whispers about the children who will  
never hold a toy balloon or blow out candles on their birthday.

and if I could sit in the back seat of some last minute taxi  
and not wince at the smoking mound on the floor or try to  
imagine who left the treasure then I too would  
retire into a world of beer checks and welfare

and if I could watch Mary's friends being molested by the  
brawling queer policeman and convince the smiling  
onlookers that it wasn't a carnival amusement then  
I too could sit contented with programs of football and  
base the success of Christmas on the number of unwashed  
children in the city's frozen playground.

and if I could pass through the Saturday night curios  
of the city without wanting to vanish into their  
mannered world then I too would pity the wafer-  
choked altar boys in their fine linen loin cloths  
serving flesh to the hung-over parish bingo players.

and if I could flee the notions of the malignant war machine  
and remain grim at the mention of the American Indian  
then I too could reach the saccharine fathers who rave  
into hi-voltage speakers for the Easter Sunday  
God Lovers who seek redemption in the breath  
of their gay creator.

and if I could staple diapers on Christ and a diaphragm  
into the Virgin and not feel like the mother of mankind  
run amok then I too would welcome with a grin all  
the cannibal priests into my open parlor.

-Norman Hindley

-Kenneth Lewalski

mahout

feeding proverbial peanuts  
to a gray lady  
cautious tributes  
laid in gained respect

a mammoth memento  
of an obsolete era  
walking heavy for clowns  
who eat popcorn  
who throw cups

a sequined cherub  
shining in ivory  
sitting a-top pillars  
that plod a circled routine  
for rows of teeth  
that open wide and gag  
on cotton candy  
and drop sticky apples  
to a sea of colored stubs  
and paper coats

taking a gray lady home  
to a house of hay  
to fettered rest  
from faces that buy  
laughs

-Kenneth Hoxie

#### A MOTHER'S LOVE

As though to evade the glance of sun,  
you scuttle from doorway to doorway  
but your strange eyes betray you.  
Eyes that neither look in nor out  
but are badly drawn like the eyes of some  
starved saint who sees a vision  
or thinks he does. What do you see old woman?  
Nothing, is it nothing you say?

What of the man you married who so soon  
paled among his stamps -- pretty bits of paper  
with cancelled scars across their faces.  
Long he stood brushing your black hair  
while his turned white; then he left you  
perched on a plush chair stroking  
with thin hands its carved roses.

He left you your dear sons who willingly  
cherished your black hair  
and porcelain hands; in their hands  
the dead aunts' silver shone  
and the tea cakes were so light  
that the bride club ate them all.

When the younger deserted you  
for some girl,  
out of love you dug up  
the long stemmed violets  
and sold them for silver, though  
they begged you not to mutilate the yard.

What of your first born who could not leave you,  
for he sat bewitched by dreams --  
pale illusion that whispered across  
the landing, slithered up the banisters  
to charge the master bedroom.  
Yet while the girls clanked over tea  
and cards, he buffed your silver brushes.

Caught in smothered gauze, he fondled  
silver illusions as you patrolled  
the landing. Chanting softly  
twisted the chiffon about your throat  
to strangle that smile; but  
the illusion broke  
against your laughing teeth.

No longer do the ladies play bridge  
in the house of torn violets  
and crumbled tea cakes, for there is no one  
to care for the silver or your black hair.  
Now you carry a tray to the room  
where your first born sits behind a door  
clutching his illusion.  
What do you see old woman, as you guard your son?

-Molly Matfield

Remember me, please, to your mother  
who hates me,  
and tell her I love you.  
She has faith in your taste  
and the thought will brighten her day.

-Cathy O'Reilly



in the universe of his imagination

he  
dancing with the  
blue monkeys  
of the glass toes  
in the  
wild cinnamon fields  
skirted by thyme  
gives a savage grin  
and strokes his cloak  
of many weirdities...

he has a prize -  
in it, he is proud  
and to the onlookers  
at the field's edge  
he sees himself  
the envied oddity...

but he does not see himself  
in the third sense -  
that of the silver bird  
in the self woven cage  
of quick drying glue -  
enslaved  
in the universe of his imagination -  
he commits adultery unto himself  
plucks the yellow petals  
from the core of his  
sensitivity and sitting  
there upon a cold turkey  
he throws the quills  
into the petal-less holes...

and laughing at the tears of his abandonment  
he enters upon a second adolescence of  
inner abstractions -  
the pimples itch -  
the tool of his art is keen  
as he carves himself into fragile moments  
of simple living  
the feast of pleasure changes as he learns to down  
the acid  
which can protect his sensitivity  
and in each passing happening  
he comes to forgive his wayward  
inner brothers  
to store away the grains of reason to feed him on the days of greatest  
hunger and  
to cherish the unrest of unknowing  
in which only can he define himself.

-Pamela Roberts

Calumet Yard

the diesel shunters  
coasting back  
and forth  
between the chains of  
innumerable numeralled cars  
standing in endless lethargic  
lines, kinking through  
switchwork, disappearing  
under bridges and around curves

coupling uncoupling recoupling  
the repetitive shocks and jars  
of flat-switching rise from  
the squealing rails to  
deafen the senses and oddly  
quicken the pulse, mixing with  
the musky odours of hot grease and smoke and iron  
as the diesel shunters,  
spewing columns of sable smoke  
coast back  
and forth  
chanting

-Merle Peirce

Oliver is gone...followed by echoes of  
melting, sliding, and searching for no end  
to suffering  
Lest he cease to create disbelief and  
feel deeply that he is like us -- one  
of the least of things

No head for level time or idle talk - but the  
palmate leaves of angel wings  
His lot: to suck the fire of hell into his  
breaking heart: to lose his head to  
better things: unwillingness to part with  
times that are and always shall be near  
and not far from the sticky singe of  
Mary's kiss -- and she'll not let him down.

But Oliver is gone...Cursing tempest, god  
and man, lifting hungry, trembling  
hand to me as we passed -- but my way  
was woven in a peaceful light and I  
could not help him in his fight against  
shadows of fear...but I loved him.

-Ken Lyon

It had begun to get cold when she finally came on stage. A soft onshore wind was fanning the salt smell through the stadium, and a dew had formed on the day's dust. Mud lay in a thin crust on the ground that stuck to your bare feet in layers like damp flour. We squirmed a bit and hunched over a little more, whispering to each other that they had saved the best for last. She sang a Dylan song first, one of his romantic ballads, I think, and then swung into a rock and roll parody. After that I lost track of what she was singing because I became absorbed by her voice and her expression. Her guitar was all around me, and I felt religiously intimate with the instrument and with her fingers. What impressed me most was her gentleness. I suppose it was then that she became a sort of madonna thing to me that I've always cherished, even when three years later I saw her frugging on stage in front of 15,000 people.

But now a fog was being wafted in, first in shreds and then like giant cotton balls. The fog gave her voice a mystical quality that I sometimes still hear when I'm close to the sea, and I could feel her fingers picking on my spine and raising goose flesh on my arms, and the music was coming as much out of me as out of her guitar.

Seemingly, hours had passed before she took off her guitar strap and made thank-you gestures to the crowd and walked toward the wings, but the crowd roared its disapproval so she came back to center stage. She was talking for a minute, and everyone started to stand up. She played the first few bars of "We Shall Overcome," and twelve and a half thousand people became one with her. When we finished singing all the verses, several of them made up on the spot, people began filing out, many humming softly to themselves, many just dazed, looking at the ground, for everyone knew instinctively that it was all over, and that it was perfect, and if we tried to prolong it anymore it would be strained. As we went out the gate the double rows of cops searched us with their inquisition faces, as if we carried contraband out of there or something, but you couldn't even hate the cops on that night.

-Russell Watts

until one day  
you are walking alone along a woody path  
and turn around  
to look into two gray eyes -- then you are walking together  
you and another...  
though all the while the essences of drummed out songs  
and the visions of godless skies  
in the cupped globe of the soul are all that the self can have...  
though all the while, white hands and whiter  
exchange the strange blossoms picked from the surprised surroundings  
of thoughts...and thoughts alone are in each, only  
partial agreements...so what then is the reason  
for walking together?  
perhaps, only a once upon a time shadow box kiss  
a circled set of fingers blowing soap bubbles into  
unbound breaths of hair.  
perhaps more, lips  
lips to say I am.

though all the while  
the question is, what is it to be?  
somewhere, though there are no dimensions to somewhere, a  
pattern fits a pattern as a cube fits sugar.  
and a season, though gone forever once, returns again with  
reason  
although that reason is yet another question, and such  
perhaps, is the answer.  
though all the while I wonder and sometimes lose  
the wide-eyed looking...  
and the mud of my mad wondering dries to cracking  
and makes an empty river bed of my toes  
till I remember the child I once was...  
though all the while I am drugged  
with a mixture of disgust and reverence for this, the peculiar  
person I've become...  
and it is left to say  
that the child was much less wrong  
for wringing textures through the eyes of hands -  
filling the alive skies with the very sound of soul  
than being full grown of hand written stories and rehearsed  
happenings and learned faiths -  
though all the while, I do not know if the child may be  
like seasons, a thing gone forever once, to return again  
with reason.

-Pamela Roberts

#### Papa

Mama gave the gold watch to Tony  
(he's the oldest)

She gave Johnny the big work belt with the brass buckle  
(the one he hit us with when we were bad)

She gave his mother's locket to Angela  
(she's getting married)

I took one good suit to the funeral man and underwear and  
socks and his black shoes.

Mama kept his wedding ring and gave me a box of shoes  
(they won't fit me for a while)

Christmas eve was rough... Mama gave his present to  
Johnny and then she read the Christmas story to us  
(like he always did)

We sat around the plaster and cardboard manger set and  
looked at the tree that was drying out. Later as I lay  
in bed with Tony and Johnny they started to cry, so I  
got up and went downstairs and polished all the shoes.

As I finished with them, one by one I put them in the  
box and my tears fell again and again in that dirty box.

-Ken Lyon



## A HAPPENING HAPPENING

There was a happening and it happened because it was a happening happening and a happening is supposed to happen and that is why it is called a happening, which happens to be what I happen to see happen. It happened to be a happening which happened to me and to me it happened that I happen to see a happening happening and it was a fond experience because to experience a happening is a fond experience and I'm fond of fond experiences which happen to be happenings happening.

I walked into the room which happened to have room because it was a room with room for a happening to happen and this happened to be the room where the happening happened. In short, it happened in this room. They gave me a dead balloon because they were supposed to give it to me because I had to have it to go into the room with room for the happening to happen. A balloon is dead because it is supposed to be dead until something happens to the balloon like a happening happening and this is what happened to the balloon. Something happened to the balloon because it was supposed to happen to the balloon at the happening and it did happen to the balloon at the happening and the balloon wasn't dead and then it was really dead because of what happened to it.

The theme of the happening was success because that was the theme of the happening and because that was the theme of the happening, the theme of the happening was success. In short, the theme was success. The happening had to be a success because the theme of the happening was success and because the theme of the happening was success the happening had to be successful. To be a successful happening on success the successful happening has to happen to be a successful happening on success because that is what it is supposed to be and that is what it must be.

However, this successful happening on success was successful because it wasn't a success because this happening wasn't supposed to be a successful happening happening. How can you have a successful happening on success when to be a successful happening on success you have to have an unsuccessful happening on success happening because that is what a successful happening on success is supposed to be. In short, there is no such thing as success. This happening happens to happen successfully on success because to have a happening happening on success it has to be unsuccessful.

To prove this was a successful unsuccessful happening on success I took the dead balloon at the happening and nothing happened at first to the balloon. Then, not now, but then, I blew the balloon up with air and that was successful because to have a successful balloon at a happening you have to blow it up with air and that is what I did. Now, when I let the successful balloon which really wasn't successful go, it lost its success because there is no such thing as success and this successful balloon wasn't really successful, it was unsuccessful and this successfully unsuccessful happening on success was successfully unsuccessful because the balloon proved it. In short, success is really a lot of hot wind.

I took the balloon then and made it successful again and then I made it more successful and finally it was so successful that it exploded because it was too successful which made it unsuccessful which really made it successful because it proved there is no such thing as success which made the happening a successful happening on success successful.

A movie was shown with a man and a chair and the man sat on the chair but the chair didn't want this and it ran from him and he ran after it but he couldn't catch it because it didn't want him to catch it because if he caught it he really wouldn't have it. The chair was success and the man wanted the chair because it was success. The man was unsuccessful but he succeeded in making the happening a success because he was unsuccessful.

Now, not then, but now, I saw a successful happening on success which had to be unsuccessful to be a successful happening on success. If this happening happened to be unsuccessful to be a happening on success because there is no such thing as success, then the happening was really unsuccessful and a successfully unsuccessful happening on success. If there is no such thing as success, then the happening was neither successful nor unsuccessful. If it can't be successful or unsuccessful, then you can't really have a happening on success because there is no such thing. It was really an unsuccessfully successfully unsuccessful happening on success. In short it was a waste of time.

-Arthur Lanoireux

I can find no one out of all those that there are. I can see no one, though I bump my head on their breasts and trip on their feet...they are not there. Mumble and rumble, buzzing tickle to the sound of a cat's scratch on a summer screen door with peeling green paint and kitchen smells in Idaho. One end looks like another from the inside out. If you could survive, would you be crawling in kelp beds of wonder? If you knew where you stood then and what you believed in would you be strong now or looking at me in hasty discomfort? I can find no one out of all of those that there are. Though I touch you and love you and sing in your ear and hold your baby, I know not. If I don't feel then will I know that I have loved you? Out of all this will they at least give me that? Will they let me remember that I have loved you?

The summer day passed and we fell away, drifting in shadows of pollen and dusk. Away, away to all the other places the master wished. High above and deep within we swooped, laughing our love song to winds of bitter promise. When the cold moon rose slowly casting lumpy shadows of purple and black, it touched your ivory breast where I had kissed you and painted your face with starlight. Ripening fields sighed in the night and we rested under a grey stone. Heavy with dew we stiffly flew before the shrieking dawn up and falling away merry to gliding hawks of scarlet. Gashes of sweet blood flowing warmly over our eyes and on our cheeks. Its heavy promise salty to the taste. The river of love the falls of man cascading to the earth with fainting slick weight. Into the chilly north to fluff the stabbing wind the killing breeze heavy with the cries of the dead. Heavy with their hysterical screams of life. Their long ice hands reaching for us but we speed out, far out to quiet black weightless void, and here we look back at earth and moon and slap our knees and laugh because it's all so small. We laugh and laugh till we cry for the little white ball and the little blue ball sitting in the corner of the master's toy box next to the fire engine and we take the biggest ball, the blue one, and bounce it back and forth. And cities fall and people scream and oceans flood and children die and old men laugh and the Pope prays, but as we bounce the ball, do you think you really know who you are? And do you think as you fall through doorways and slippery kitchens through soft rugs and parties over and over, under on top, will you even remember my name in the next toy box?

\_\_\_ SARAH SOMEONE \_\_\_

#### Characters

Sarah, or the figure in the circle  
The woman, or Sarah's mother  
The man, or Sarah's father  
Paul  
Four figures  
Chorus of children's voices

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This play takes place in a series of happenings which are one and the same movement. The scene is deep within the complex of the girl Sarah's imagination. In the center of stage dark is a dim light which falls upon the shoulders of a slim girl standing in the circle projected from a grey light above her head. She is standing in profile towards stage left. Her rather long brown hair obscures her from the audience and helps to keep out part of the light. As if this mere lighting were still too strong, the figure uses her hand to shield her eyes. Her head is hung dejectedly and her torso is half-twisted so that she is directed towards the back of the stage where there is total darkness. She is colored dark grey by the lights and clothing she wears.

When the curtain first opens the lighting around the dark figure helps to convey an intense restlessness on the quietness of the stage. Shortly, the sounds of slight painful sobs can intermittently be heard between pauses of thoughtful silence. The figure steps out of the circle by making a semi-turn towards the back of the stage, and she comes up and around to front stage right, the moment she steps out of the circle the grey light gradually fades out, and simultaneously, a bright spotlight focuses on the girl and sets her off from the black stage. Now that she can be seen it is obvious that she is at least twenty years old, perhaps a little older. She crouches to pick up a red ball. In the same motion she picks up one side of her long flare skirt and holds it towards the back of her. As she begins the child's game of bouncing the ball and passing it under her leg, she sings in a far-off voice as if she's thinking of words which are no longer mere ritual. It is important that the song be contemplative and be sung very slowly. She bounces the ball once and passes it under her leg as she says each line:

SARAH, OR THE FIGURE IN THE CIRCLE

A my name is Al...ice  
My husband's name...is Al

(She catches the ball in two hands  
and holds it out in front of her  
as though thinking of somethin' g.  
Then she con tinues...

We come from Ala...bama  
And we...

(She is abruptly interrupted by  
a chorus of sharp children's voices  
coming from off stage. They finish  
the tune in rough harsh tones...

CHORUS

And wa-like-apples!

(At the sound of the abrupt shouts  
Sarah becomes frightened and drops  
the ball. When it hits the floor  
the spotlight goes out. She can be  
heard sobbing in the darkness of  
the stage. Gradually, the grey  
light comes on, and we see her in  
the center as we did before.  
Slowly, she raises her head as though  
someone were talking...

CHORUS

Sar...ah!...Sar....ah!

WOMAN'S VOICE (from off stage)

Sarah, go out and play.  
I don't want you in this house another day.

(A spotlight is turned on to stage  
left and reveals four figures  
playing a child's game. They are  
dressed in black leotards and are as  
old as Sarah. They do not look like  
children. The first shadow-like  
creature is facing the other three  
who are standing in line with their  
backs towards stage left. The 2nd  
figure, the one standing closest to  
the back of the stage, is posing  
with hand on hip, weight on one leg,  
and she is taking deep drags on a  
cigarette. The third figure is packing  
make up on and is oblivious to every-  
thing but herself. A 4th figure is  
bent over, hanging with hands loose,  
her long black hair touching the  
floor...



1ST FIGURE (authoritatively)

All right everybody. Get ready there. We don't have all day, you know.

(The figures hop to attention, hands by sides and standing stiffly. The 1st figure addresses the 2nd figure...)

1ST FIGURE

You may take two umbrella steps.

2ND FIGURE

May I?

1ST FIGURE

Yes, you may.

(2nd figure puts index finger pointing down towards top of head and makes two circles advancing towards 1st figure)

1ST FIGURE (looking at 3rd figure)

And you, you may take two giant steps.

3RD FIGURE

May I?

1ST FIGURE

Yes. Yes you may.

(3rd figure takes two giant steps. While she is doing this Sarah takes her place as next in line...)

1ST FIGURE (looking at 4th figure)

You may take one baby step.

4TH FIGURE

May I?

1ST FIGURE

No. You may not. You may take two toad leaps.

4TH FIGURE

May I?

1ST FIGURE

Yes you may.

(4th figure crouches and makes two toad-like leaps...)

1ST FIGURE (looking at Sarah)

You there. You may take three old lady's steps.

SARAH

May I?

1ST FIGURE

No you may not... (Sarah cries, ges)  
You may take three bunny hops.

SARAH

May I?

1ST FIGURE

No you may not. You may take four.

SARAH

Bunny hops?

1ST FIGURE

No. Old lady's steps, stupid!

(Sarah self-consciously takes four old lady's steps. The children watch her to the very last step. Then in unison they all shout,...)

CHORUS

Go all the way back. You forgot to say 'May I'.

(To Sarah it is a jeering, mocking tone, and she runs back into the center again. As the dim light goes on thin sobs can be heard in darkness. Sarah is more crouched than she was in the beginning and now turns her head back to stage left where she

hears voices. They sound like the deep solemn whispers she associates with a funeral parlor. As the voices emerge in conversation a spotlight gradually begins to grow around a man and woman talking in their livingroom. If the light from her own circle hurts Sarah's eyes the light from the spotlight is unbearable. She turns her face away from it and merely listens...

THE WOMAN, or Sarah's mother

I just don't know what to do with that girl, Jim. She's just impossible! Talking to you's no help.

THE MAN, or Sarah's father

Don't tell me about it. I'll take care of the boy. She's your problem. I'll take care of the boy.

THE WOMAN

I'll bet you will. Just like you did when he christened Micky's tires with orange paint. (She mimics him) 'I'll take care of the boy.' Do you take care of anything around here ever!

THE MAN

I'll say it once, Mel. Don't start.

THE WOMAN

You never let me start anything you can't finish.

THE MAN

God damn it! Have it your way.

(He takes his coat from off the living room chair and starts for the door...

THE WOMAN

Jim!

(He stops...

She really doesn't have anything to wear. The kids at the high school made fun of her the last time. She won't go to this one. It's the Christmas dance.

THE MAN

If she's ashamed to wear the clothes she's got let her stay home. And if that dumb wop that's taking her out doesn't like the way she looks, let him take somebody else.

(He yanks the door open...

THE WOMAN

All right Jim. All right.

(He goes out and slams the door. When the door bangs the spotlight is replaced by the light around Sarah in stage center... This light begins to get a little larger and as the circle widens the woman approaches Sarah from backstage right. She circles Sarah, chin-in-hand, pausing at each side of her and commenting...

Sarah always was unhappy -- long as I can remember. If it wasn't a dress it was something else.

(She pauses and laughs a little...

A grasshopper once. A greed ol' silly ol' grasshopper someone didn't mean to step on.

(The woman moves around to the other side of Sarah...

and then there was the time her cousin Mitzie lost the rag doll. Sarah was so upset she gave her all of her dolls...every single one. Sarah never used to like to play with dolls.....paper dolls.....real dolls. 'Didn't know how,' she used to say.

(Shaking her head...

Imagine?...Didn't know how to play with dolls.

(The woman addresses Sarah emphatically...

Sarah, what's wrong with you?

(Sarah who has been staring at her mother bewilderingly now puts her hands to her ears as if to shut her mother out. The spotlight begins to get smaller, and the woman walks away towards stage right, leaving Sarah in a dim light. This time she is not sobbing but frantically calling for...

SARAH

Paul. Paul. Where's Paul?

(More urgently now...

Where are you Paul?

(She makes a complete circle as if looking for Paul from within the circle. She falls to a kneeling position which she sustains a few moments and then buries her face in flare skirt...  
Paul comes on the stage and approaches Sarah from stage left, from the back of the circle. He can't see her. She doesn't look at him...

PAUL

Sar...ah. Sarah?

(Now he approaches the circle from the other side. His voice is more urgent...

Sarah!

(Paul comes forward to stage right and looks over the heads of the audience, contemplating...

SARAH

I'm in here, Paul. Don't you understand? Can't you understand that?

(Sarah has not lifted her head. Her sounds come out barely distinguishable. Paul does not hear her at all. He begins to speak sincerely...

PAUL

I tried so hard, Sarah.

(He pauses...Then says very softly...

Good-bye, Sarah.

(Paul turns and walks towards the back of the stage and to the left. Before he leaves he says quite convincingly to himself as he looks back over his left shoulder...

PAUL

Sarah...I mean it this time.

(Paul leaves the stage. A chorus of children's voices sing proudly from off stage...

CHORUS

He says he really means it.  
He says he really means it.

(Sarah lifts her head and says in realization...

SARAH

He does mean it. He does mean it this time.

(There is an obvious silence, and then Sarah begins to speak again. Her words are less coherent now, and she's looking towards stage left...

Now, please Sarah. Don't do this to me again. We've been through this so many times...

(She pauses, waits...

It's been weeks since I've seen you,...Sarah.

(Sarah begins to put a lot of expression into her words, pausing when she comes to her name, and emphasizing it sarcastically...

Do you know what that means about us, Sarah? We're not in high school anymore. We've come a long way since then...At least, I have Sarah. I have to stop moving backwards. I've wanted to be understanding. I've tried so hard. I could wait, Sarah. I could wait to be married to you. I can slow down, but I can't move backwards anymore!

(The speech has become more emotional and...

You make it sound like such a favor! Is it so terribly hard?

(Sarah screams...

Never want a favor! Never! Never!

(The woman comes from stage right and breaking easily into the circle, she goes over to Sarah and strokes her hair. As she does this she sings, but not gently...

THE WOMAN

Little Sally Saucer  
Sitting in a Saucer...

(The man comes on from stage right. He takes the woman by the hand, and all six figures join hand-in-hand around Sarah. The man continues his song...

THE MAN

Cry, Sally, Cry Sally  
Wipe your dirty eyes, Sally...

(Now all the voices join in, and Sarah who has been crouching in the circle, is forced to get up and carry out the rituals of the game. She puts her right hand over her eyes and points with her other arm extended to stage right. She maintains this position turning with the words of the song, first clockwise, and then counter-clockwise. When she turns in the opposite direction she blocks her eyes with her other hand, and points with the remaining one...

CHORUS OF SIX

Turn to the East, Sally...

(She turns to the "East"...

Turn to the West, Sally...

(She turns to the "West"....  
Now she turns clockwise and switches motions again...

Turn to the very one that you like best!

(When Sarah stops she uncovers her eyes to find that she is pointing to her father. He commands her in a tone one uses to tell a dog he can't

do something. His voice is deep and hollow...

THE MAN

(Picking up her father's tone Sarah sarcastically, yet pathetically, crawls over to her mother, panting heavily and mimicking a dog that's sitting up begging...

THE WOMAN

Oh honestly, Sarah. Don't you think you're exaggerating it just a bit.

(The man and woman leave the stage arm and arm. Sarah turns to the four black figures who are still holding hands, but are standing in a line. She goes over to them quickly, taking the hands of two of the figures. as if to break into the line...

SARAH

May I?

FIGURES

No you may not!

(They run off the stage, hands still joined cheerleader style...  
As Sarah sinks into her circle, it becomes smaller and smaller. She is kneeling down, sobbing frantically. Simultaneously, the light begins to shrivel out and Sarah folds into herself, giving out weird painful sounds. At once she puts her hands up to hold her head, shaking her head back and forth as the sounds heighten to an uncontrollable scream which continues a few moments after the lights go out.

-Nancy Barry



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