The Red Wheelbarrow
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Table of Contents
Jori Frankie..................The Face of My Mother 1
Jill Warsett..................Destinations 2
Pamela R. Gourley........Water 4
Clare Nathan..............Garry and Etta 6
Alana Naughtin........The Garden 11
Mika Perrine............Warmth 12
Josh Ben Friedman......Blinko's Back 13

Cover Art
Jesse Eustis
Over the years,
tears have worn deep channels
into the tired skin of my mother's cheeks.
These riverbeds,
fecund with the elusive mystery of past,
have carved away flesh and confidence,
and in their banks of loam, have buried youth.

As a child,
I traced each rivulet from source to final pool
and marveled that moss did not grow in the trenches.
I fingered the dirt and rock of her cheekbones
and wondered whether I, too, would someday
have skin like hers,
organic and sodden with tears.

Today, the mirror
shows my jaw to be smooth;
free of streams and furrows.
But when I see myself, in dreams,
or in thoughts, I see on my body
the face of my mother.
And I taste on my lips the salt of her tears.
from his hand. They wrestle each other. DORRIS isn't sure what to do. BLINKO finally grabs hold of the gun.

BLINKO
Smile, Smiles. This is the best part of your show. The end.

Silence. BLINKO slowly pulls the trigger and out pops a flag that says “The End” on it. BLINKO'S eyes grow wide in disbelief. DORRIS latches on to SMILES. SMILES lights up a cigarette and exits the office with a huge smile on his face. Steven Sondheim’s “SEND IN THE CLOWNS” plays.

FADE OUT

Destinations
Jill Warsett

The house itself was nothing to get excited about. Many people who drove on I-95 passed it daily without knowing it. From the outside, it looked like a rundown soup kitchen or a dwelling for bums passing through Denio. It could have been a photograph from the Depression. Even the curtains fit the look: torn up like old Kleenex, hanging limp with only clothespins holding them up.

When Wayne and his family moved in, the people in the neighborhood still kept their doors unlocked, and Wayne's two children were still allowed to play outside with other little kids. Wayne's wife, Nancy, still borrowed flour and eggs from the other women on the block, and the freeway was only a county plan about to be put into action. It excited Wayne to think of all the people who would soon drive past his house on their way north to Orlando or south to Miami. He fantasized about climbing to the top of the new billboard in front of his home that showed white teeth, long fingernails, and Virginia Slims. He would think about sitting up there, in front of that enormous smile on the sign, and waving to all of the people who drove by below. They'd honk and wave back. Some drivers would stop to take Wayne's picture or yell to him out their windows.

The anticipation of watching the road-workers agitated him. It seemed to take so long for everything to be put in its place. Wayne found himself wishing to be part of the construction. He would have built the freeway in seven days, as God had done so elegantly with the earth.

When the road was finally completed, Wayne would drive home from the office quickly. He would spend an hour on his front porch drinking iced tea and watching the cars drive by. He especially liked the days when trucks rolled into ditches or when there were five-car pileups so cars crawled by slow enough for Wayne to look at everyone's face. These people were only passing through Denio. They lived in apartments and houses in big cities and small rural areas. They lived alone or with big families. Some of them had just learned how to drive and others were going to get their licences revoked because they were senile. None of them watched Wayne, but Wayne watched them. He thought of how lucky they all were. People
were looking forward to these drivers coming home again. The
two women who fixed their makeup and the men who shaved in traffic
amused Wayne.

Every once in a while, Wayne and his family would be inter-
rupted during dinner by someone who had run out of gas or lost a
hubcap. After Wayne showed them to the phone in the kitchen, he
often invited his new friend to stay and have dinner with his family.
This did not please Nancy, but this way, Wayne could really learn
about the wonderful faces that he saw every day.

After months of watching the freeway, Wayne began to forget
about his life at home. He made up stories in his head about the men
who passed by in big Volvos. They were going to see their newborn
baby in the hospital, to inform their wife that they had been layed off,
or going to visit a prostitute before going home to a dying mother.

Nancy hated the freeway. She began to give up hope that
Wayne would ever pay attention to his family again. She saw his
longing to be part of the glorious rush-hour traffic, and Nancy could
not understand it at all. Many nights she argued with him that it was
just a road, but to him, it was more than a road. At night when they
lay in bed, Nancy could almost feel his thoughts: they were far away
in the middle of a car crash or a traffic jam.

When the dirty brown truck broke down right in front of
Wayne’s home, he was immediately on the scene. Nancy was watch-
ing from the kitchen window. He had run up the hill; speaking rap-
idly, he shook the driver’s hand. Together the two husky men lifted
the hood of the car and pointed to different gadgets inside. When the
freeway patrolman finally arrived hours later, Wayne and the truck
driver had already bonded over several cans of beer.

Still smiling as he walked back to the house that night, Wayne
decided he was ready to leave. When his two children and his wife
had fallen asleep, Wayne took his coat and wallet and walked out to
the side of the freeway. He stuck his thumb up, and in less than an
hour, he was riding away.

BLINKO
What do you want from me?

SMILES
You know what I want.

BLINKO
Yeah.

BLINKO stands, goes to the door and closes it. BLINKO directs DORRIS
to sit in a chair. She looks uncomfortable.

BLINKO
You want it, come and get it.

Music starts BLINKO and SMILES glare at each other. Both begin to
perform different tricks, trying to outdo each other for DORRIS. At
first she looks very nervous, but soon a smile appears on her face.
BLINKO grows tired and grabs the gun off of his desk. He points it at
SMILES. SMILES glares at BLINKO. DORRIS covers her eyes.

SMILES
I beat you, Blinko. You know I did. You
cheated me at the National Clown-off and
you went to Vegas and took all my glory.
You took my girl. You left me here, doing
the birthday party circuit. But you know
something, it was all worth it. Cause now we
both know the truth.

DORRIS
Oh, Smiles.

BLINKO
Say good-bye, Dorris, to your friend.

BLINKO laughs excitedly. SMILES attacks BLINKO, knocking the gun

20
lays it on the desk.

  BLINKO
  Nice of you to drop in.

  SMILES
  Blinko....

  BLINKO
  Since I came back in town, I was wondering when you were going to square things up.

  SMILES
  When I was going to square things up?

  BLINKO
  Yeah.

  SMILES
  When I.... You gotta lotta nerve coming back here.

  DORRIS enters with coffee.

  DORRIS
  I thought you clowns might be thirsty.

  SMILES looks at DORRIS with a pained expression on his face. BLINKO notices.

  BLINKO
  She's mine, Smiles.
  (DORRIS looks up)

  SMILES
  You stole her from me, Blinko, just like the championship clown-off.

  Water
  Pamela R. Gourley
  -for Sylvia

  I.
  There were those frosty winter nights, the thin white layers among the fallen leaves, when I was frightened of the moon and those dark shadows lingering in my room. Like a ghost, I crept softly along plush carpet, polished wood, fresh linoleum, then waterweeds; the soft white cotton of my nightgown flowing behind me like dreams. Ah, the river, gentle, enticing.

  II.
  Naked, the remains of my baby fat crumple around my knees and across my stomach, the wrinkles magnified by the shallow pool water. I'm sitting on the first step, my mother's back turns. I descend head-first and float on the surface, how easy! Have I become an angel?

  III.
  I move the wet cloth over the swells of my new breasts, then across the perspiration of my neck and forehead. Why hadn't I been born a boy? I roll over, water spills from the sides of the white marble tub; I swallow. God, may this be my communion cup, may this be my baptism.
IV.
I shower in the dark now.
The light makes everything too easy;
it hides the truth.
So it is in the dark that I sit
at the bottom of this cement tomb,
warm water beating down against my back.
I fumble for the pretty pink razor I bought
in a pack of ten at the drugstore yesterday--
with ten tries, how can I fail?
This is an art, I tell myself,
letting loose the rivers of my body,
waiting for the water to run cold.

SMILES

Dorris?

DORRIS

Is that you, Smiles?

SMILES

Blinko?

DORRIS

He's in there.

SMILES

I've missed you.

DORRIS

I've missed you too.

SMILES punches his hand. He heads towards a door leading into BLINKO'S office. DORRIS stares at SMILES. SMILES gives a smile to DORRIS as he opens the door and enters the office.

INNER OFFICE

BLINKO, a dark clown with an afro wig and a leather jacket, sits on top of his desk, anticipating SMILES'S entrance. SMILES stops dead in his tracks once he sees BLINKO.

BLINKO

(calmingly)
Hello, Smiles.

SMILES

Blinko.

Silence as the two eye each other. Tension is adrift in the air. You could cut it with a knife. BLINKO takes a large gun out of his desk and
Yeah.

I've seen that trick before.

Yeah?

A clown came to our school.

He was wonderful.

He did that exact trick.

And handsome.

He was handsome.

Oh yeah? What was this handsome clown's name?

Blinko. Why didn't we get Blinko, Mommy?

DORRIS is a beautiful secretary. She sensually smokes a cigarette. SMILES enters.

Garry and Etta
Clare Nathan

Garry didn't have to work before Etta came to live with him. He had gone to high school in Fowler, and both he and his mother lived comfortably off his father's life insurance money. Etta, he realized much later, was a mistake. A horrible, horrendous mistake. In his mind, she took on the character of a mountain, of something huge and implacable, a force placed in their midst, an unquestionably permanent fixture in his life.

Before Etta came to live with him, Garry had vague ideas about starting an auto repair shop, or a snow-plowing service. As the days darkened, and all of Michigan began to descend into what seemed a constant day of drizzle and low hanging grey sky, he would take his truck out during the evening. He'd drive aimlessly on the muddy roads where he could have gotten stuck, but never did, and sometimes he'd go out to the football field. He'd sit, the windshield wipers off, staring through the haze and dusk at the empty field. After he brought Etta home, these evenings with their comforting void and emptiness were gone.

Even though it was generally admitted that the girl was at least half retarded, everyday she was packed off to school. A cheap form of babysitting, Garry thought. The school didn't have any objections because retarded or not they received money based on how many students showed up everyday. She simply sat in classes staring blankly off into space. Teachers had long since stopped supplying her with paper and pens. She had breasts like melons and hips like buckets, and it seemed to him that her clothes could barely contain her. It seemed that every stitch was stretched to its limit with honey colored flesh. She was nearly six feet tall, and Garry noticed that she wore men's work boots. The features of her moon-shaped face were plump and fleshy, her eyelids heavy-looking, her lips like overripe berries.

She was so large that it was not until very late in her pregnancy that he noticed it. Her stomach was so swollen that sometimes her shirt would slide up, exposing her bulging midriff. Whoever it was that dressed her in the morning began putting her in something that was either a maternity dress or a tremendous nightgown. She still
wore the same work boots.

Garry and his mother lived on back roads, but where Etta’s family lived, there was not another house for miles around. He had a snow plow he attached to his truck, and he’d plow their drive a few times until he realized he wasn’t going to get paid for the job. The original part of the house was one of those tiny homesteads that had three rooms, but as far as he could see, every time there was a new family member they simply tacked on a new addition. The walls leaned dangerously against each other, sagging inward, and Garry noticed that for some reason chicken wire was stapled up over the windows. Pieces of plywood lay haphazardly in the mud and slush, perhaps a sort of crude walkway.

The first day she stopped coming to school, Garry knew she’d had the baby. When he left school that day he at first planned on going home, but as he drove he found himself thinking of Etta and the baby. They wouldn’t go to a hospital, he knew. He wondered who it could have been. Her father? A brother? Any boy at school could have done it, he considered. He imagined the group of boys who hung out behind the cafeteria and smoked weed had somehow managed to get her back there, and how each had taken his turn with her. She’d be as still and patient, he thought, as a cow being molested by some little fourteen-year-old boys, their pricks tiny, as unnoticeable as flies.

The whole thing bothered him. Not in a fully fleshed-out sort of way, but there was a vague feeling that something was amiss. He couldn’t quite decide what it was that made him uneasy about it. He knew just as well as anybody else that it really didn’t matter what happened to her; she was an imbecile from the trashiest family in Fowler. It was the sort of place where the people who lived there would have left if they had anywhere to go, but they didn’t, and all they knew was that they weren’t imbeciles, and not quite so trashy as Etta’s family either. It was alleviating to know there were people stupider and poorer then they were, and that is where most people in Fowler left the situation.

Garry wasn’t sure why he didn’t go home. Instead he found himself driving out to Etta’s place. A school bus was in front of him, and he watched it pull up to the house. Three shabbily dressed kids straggled out and made their way up to the front door. At first, he

Nobody laughs. We hear a BOOMING LAUGH from the background. A heavy woman, presumably the boy’s mother, gives SMILES a thumbs-up.

SMILES
Okay, kids. I have a bad cold and I am oh-so-tired of blowing my nose. Has that ever happened to you?

LEO is silent.

SMILES
Leo?

MOTHER
Talk, Leo. Mr. Clown is asking you a question.

SMILES
It’s Smiles.

MOTHER
What?

MOTHER
My name isn’t Mr. Clown, it’s Bozo, it’s Smiles. Now I am going to eat this Kleenex so I don’t have to blow my nose anymore.

SMILES places a Kleenex in his mouth and begins to pull out a streamer. The kids are motionless. The streamer continues to come from Smiles’ mouth. Mother LAUGHS and LAUGHS. Leo looks frightened. Smiles comes to the end of the streamer and bows. There is silence. Leo tugs at the Smiles’ big pants. Smiles looks down.

SMILES
Mr. Clown-
does Blinko blink?

DIZZY
C'mon-

SMILES
Does he flicker on and off like a bug zapper?

DIZZY
Smiles, be nice-

SMILES
And now he comes back to my town? My town, this Blinko.

LIVING ROOM

Four or five kids sit on the floor in front of SMILES. A young boy sits with his mouth wide open, drooling. Two kids, one boy and one girl, are standing next to SMILES.

SMILES
(to boy assistant.) My name is Smiles, what's yours?

LEO
Leo.

SMILES
That's a nice name. How old are ya, Leo?

LEO holds up five fingers.

SMILES
Are you married?
Cars and Trucks. It was off the interstate, and a huge neon-lit cross glowed day and night in front of the place.

When the baby got home, things changed. His mother insisted they name it Bill, after Garry's father, but all it actually ever got called was the baby. The first thing he realized about it was that it was ugly; its face was still tiny and rumpled, but its nose was huge for a baby and turned up, giving it the look of an angry piglet. It screamed day and night, and Garry began to look forward to work. He came close to losing his job a few times because he would doze off beneath the cars he was supposed to be fixing.

At night, his sleep was uneasy, riddled with the sounds of the baby crying, and dreams of his father's trucking accident that played and replayed in his mind like a never-ending movie. Mentally, the whole scene became clear, aspects of it he'd never known, or could not know, solidified, became unquestionable facts.

He dreamed of his father driving late at night against the deadline, a hobo hitchhiker dozing in the passenger seat. His eyes slid shut, perhaps he'd had a beer too many at dinner, or maybe it was just plain exhaustion. The truck, a massive semi loaded with dry goods, had gone off a steep incline, toppling over and over down into the muddy gully below. His father and the hitchhiker were both crushed, and he imagined how the early light of dawn had crept over the icy stream and mangled truck, everything quiet except for the gurgle of water and an occasional hiss from the engine.

Etta was both a capable and incapable mother. She could sit placidly for hours with the baby, screaming or sleeping, in her arms. It was impossible, though, to train her to change diapers. At first Garry's mother bought formula milk for the baby, but as milk came oozing out of Etta's breasts, soaking the front of her shirts, it became apparent that it would be much easier to simply set the baby in her arms and draw her breast out. Etta slept on a fold-out couch in the living room, and the baby slept with Garry's mother, who was afraid that if she left it with Etta, the girl would roll over on it.

It occurred to Garry that for all he was getting out of the situation he might as well be the baby's father. He wondered what it would have been like, pressing himself into that bovine mass of flesh, her thighs soft and pliant, spreading at the nudge of his hand. He'd been with another girl before, but she was tiny, really only a wisp of a

SMILES

What the hell kinda name is Blinko?

DIZZY

(shocked)

I can't believe you just said that. What if somebody heard you?

SMILES

You picked your name, right?

Yeah.

SMILES

You picked Dizzy.

I'm clumsy.

DIZZY

So-

SMILES

Your name is fitting for your personality. My name is Smiles. You know why?

DIZZY is silent.

SMILES

Because I love to smile. I love to smile so damn much that the damn kids, the damn kids, started to call me Smiles. I was bestowed with the name of Smiles. Now I am asking,
Josh Ben Friedman
BLINKO'S BACK

FADE IN:

DRESSING ROOM

SMILES, a male clown, sits in front of a mirror putting the finishing touches on his make-up. He takes a red wig from his doctor's bag, which he places atop his head with the greatest of ease. He practices his large smile in the mirror. He stops with a look of disgust on his face. He pulls out a pack of cigarettes, takes one out and lights it up. He puffs happily on the cigarette.

A door leading into the dressing room slowly opens as DIZZY, a heavy clown, enters. He has rainbow hair. DIZZY enters quietly, attempting not to have SMILES know he has entered. DIZZY plants his feet on the ground as SMILES takes a long drag on his cigarette.

DIZZY

Blinko's back.

There is a long silence as SMILES smokes. He puts out the cigarette as we see the make-up stain on the cigarette filter. SMILES does not turn to face DIZZY.

DIZZY

You gonna talk to him? It would be a good idea for you to talk to Blinko. You gonna talk to him, Smiles?

There is another silence as SMILES puts some more make-up on his face and fixes his hair.

DIZZY

I don't think he's mad, Smiles. I've been told that Blinko is certainly not mad at you.

female. Her chest was flat, her bones hard and pokey; she seemed, he thought, to be all elbows and ribs. The whole time she'd squirmed beneath him, complaining, in her little, squeaky voice, that it hurt.

The day the baby died Garry's mother had left to go grocery shopping. All morning it had been screaming; it was colic, Garry's mother said, and he'd decided to fix the washing machine. Suddenly the job had seemed particularly appealing to him, because the washing machine was in the basement, and he found that with earplugs in and the door shut, it was completely quiet down there. He came up after some hours, thinking that he would get some lunch.

It was quiet, he realized, so he took out his earplugs. He made sandwiches for him and Etta, and walked into the living room. As usual, she was staring blankly at the wall in front of her, but Garry noticed that the baby was still, too still. He bent over, staring into its face, and saw that it was bluer than when he'd first found them sitting outside. Hanging from the zipper on Etta's sweatshirt was a piece of colored yarn, which he remembered had a tassel on the end, and Garry realized that the baby had sucked it down its throat and simply suffocated. He stared transfixed at the stiff little creature in her arms, the yarn dangling down into its mouth. Suddenly Etta's eye's focused on the sandwiches, and she stood up, reaching out to grab one. The baby slid from her arms and on to the floor like a discarded rag doll, leaving a string of drool dangling from the pink tassel.

There were things, Garry knew, that people were required to feel bad about, but it turned out, he only felt bad about not feeling bad. Even after they'd had the baby buried in a plot right next to Garry's father, the little stone reading, "Bill Jr. was loved greatly in his short time on earth," he did not feel particularly sad. Etta stayed with them, and he kept his job at Resurrection Cars and Trucks. Sometimes as he drove to work, and the sky was fiery with purples and reds of the rising sun, and the fields tinted orange a little feeling would creep into him that perhaps he had missed something. Though he wondered how the sun could possibly come every day with such glory, there was, somewhere resting in the back of his mind, the notion that this feeble town full of tired people was not all it had to rise over.
The Garden
Alana Naughtin

In late August, my mother's tomato plants dropped their sour, heavy fruit. Under the leaves, they shrivelled and leaked, tunneled through by worms and black beetles. She bought seven orange carp for our pond. Wild mint and bleeding hearts arched over the flagstone rim.

My mother planted seeds and shoots in the black bed of soil, and by summer it was a three-foot maze of tangled herbs and wildflowers.

In midsummer, we would sit together at the kitchen table, a pile of green stems and leaves crushed between our fingers until our skin burned. We sorted them: oregano, basil, lemongrass, sweet anise and sage. We bundled them and wrapped the ends with grey twine. They hung from the ceiling, fading to grey and brown as the sap dried.

My mother, on her knees, digs in the musty miller. Cumulus clouds blow in over the long, black slant of the roof. The peeling white shed door swings on its hinges. The hummingbird windchime stirs.

Warmth
Mika Perrine

My parents light the sauna at midwinter. My father hauls loads of firewood, my mother, buckets of water from the bathtub. They light candles, and their friends come, bearing food and wine and laughter in from the cold. Over our kitchen table they talk children and football games, and politics with a leftist bent; they lean back, comfortable in this warm ending to the day. They slip out by threes or fours to the sauna and come back flushed and clean, smelling of incense and soap. From my bedroom, I can see light burning in the sauna windows, a brilliance in the cold night. I imagine their talk within, low murmurs, their bodies resting naked against the walls. The stove a presence of whining heat. Hot rocks hiss; steaming, they douse themselves with the water. They do not notice each other beyond the simplicity of sound, the stasis they have come to. They do not need to move, or see each other. That comfort is what we do not yet possess. With three boys I grew up with I sit and play poker and talk pot and good music and pass on news of other friends. We laugh at our parents but do not look too long at one another. We know this well-lit bedroom is close enough, our bodies beneath clothes bear too much tension to contain. It seems a long time until we, too, will come to saunas, strip away clothes and wade into heat. Before we will not care enough to see. Only the taste of heat remaining, each body crumbling into darkness, like a child we'll leave behind, resting on the wooden benches our parents built.
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Does he flicker on and off like a bug zapper?

DIZZY

Smiles, be nice-

SMILES

And now he comes back to my town?
My town, this Blinko.

LIVING ROOM

Four or five kids sit on the floor in front of SMILES. A young boy sits with his mouth wide open, drooling. Two kids, one boy and one girl, are standing next to SMILES.

SMILES
(to boy assistant.)
My name is Smiles, what's yours?

LEO

Leo.

SMILES
That's a nice name. How old are ya, Leo?

LEO holds up five fingers.

SMILES
Are you married?

was so intent on watching them that he did not notice a figure sitting on a broken lawn chair to the side of the house. When he drove up closer, he saw that it was Etta, still wearing the nightgown or maternity dress, her boots undone, laces trailing in the mud. Resting between her knees was a bundle which he decided was the baby. He rolled down his window and yelled to one of the kids, "Hey, why's she sitting out there like that? It's ass-freezing weather."

One of them, a boy, turned and said "Ma probably ain't letting her in 'cause the baby won't stop hollering." Garry couldn't make much sense of this, but at the moment, he decided he couldn't just leave her sitting there. He got out and walked to where she was. The children had disappeared inside, and the windows, beneath the grime and the chicken wire, were dark. He picked up the baby, letting Etta's hands fall into her lap, and with his free hand he nudged her to a standing position. He didn't know how long they'd been outside, and though the baby was breathing, its lips were blue and it was strangely silent.

His mother was angry, but for a different reason than Garry thought she would be. He'd assumed she'd just be mad about the inconvenience in general, but instead she thought Garry had brought Etta home because the baby was his. She was a short, wide woman, and she planted herself in front of him bellowing, "We barely have enough, and then you go and get some idiot girl's belly all full. What do you think we're supposed to do? We have her, and now your little half idiot to boot."

"But it ain't mine..." he'd started to say.

"Oh, so now you're backing out, are you? First you bring her back like she's your danged bride, and now you tell me you got them here just for the fun of it?"

It all ended up that Etta stayed. Garry's mother still thought the baby was his, but her temper had cooled about the whole issue. The first few weeks were quiet because the baby was in the hospital with pneumonia. Garry stopped going to school and started plowing people's driveways for money. He got up sometimes before four a.m., and drove through the cold and quiet of Michigan rural roads. His headlights made a yellow glow against the snow, causing the shadows of barren trees to hop and flicker in the darkness. He made no money this way, though, so he took a job at a used car lot called Resurrection
wore the same work boots.

Garry and his mother lived on back roads, but where Etta’s family lived, there was not another house for miles around. He had a snow plow he attached to his truck, and he’d plow their drive a few times until he realized he wasn’t going to get paid for the job. The original part of the house was one of those tiny homesteads that had three rooms, but as far as he could see, every time there was a new family member they simply tacked on a new addition. The walls leaned dangerously against each other, sagging inward, and Garry noticed that for some reason chicken wire was stapled up over the windows. Pieces of plywood lay haphazardly in the mud and slush, perhaps a sort of crude walkway.

The first day she stopped coming to school, Garry knew she’d had the baby. When he left school that day he at first planned on going home, but as he drove he found himself thinking of Etta and the baby. They wouldn’t go to a hospital, he knew. He wondered who it could have been. Her father? A brother? Any boy at school could have done it, he considered. He imagined the group of boys who hung out behind the cafeteria and smoked weed had somehow managed to get her back there, and how each had taken his turn with her. She’d be as still and patient, he thought, as a cow being molested by some little fourteen-year-old boys, their pricks tiny, as unnoticeable as flies.

The whole thing bothered him. Not in a fully fleshed-out sort of way, but there was a vague feeling that something was amiss. He couldn’t quite decide what it was that made him uneasy about it. He knew just as well as anybody else that it really didn’t matter what happened to her; she was an imbecile from the trashiest family in Fowler. It was the sort of place where the people who lived there would have left if they had anywhere to go, but they didn’t, and all they knew was that they weren’t imbeciles, and not quite so trashy as Etta’s family either. It was alleviating to know there were people stupider and poorer then they were, and that is where most people in Fowler left the situation.

Garry wasn’t sure why he didn’t go home. Instead he found himself driving out to Etta’s place. A school bus was in front of him, and he watched it pull up to the house. Three shabbily dressed kids straggled out and made their way up to the front door. At first, he...

Nobody laughs. We hear a BOOMING LAUGH from the background. A heavy woman, presumably the boy’s mother, gives SMILES a thumbs-up.

SMILES
Okay, kids. I have a bad cold and I am oh-so-tired of blowing my nose. Has that ever happened to you?

LEO is silent.

SMILES
Leo?

MOTHER
Talk, Leo. Mr. Clown is asking you a question.

SMILES
It’s Smiles.

MOTHER
What?

SMILES
My name isn’t Mr. Clown, it isn’t Bozo, it’s Smiles. Now I am going to eat this Kleenex so I don’t have to blow my nose anymore.

SMILES places a Kleenex in his mouth and begins to pull out a streamer. The kids are motionless. The streamer continues to come from Smiles’s mouth. Mother LAUGHS and LAUGHS. Leo looks frightened. SMILES comes to the end of the streamer and bows. There is silence. Leo tugs at the Smile’s big pants. SMILES looks down.

Mr. Clown-
Yeah.

LEO
I've seen that trick before.

Yeah?

LEO
A clown came to our school.

GIRL IN AUDIENCE
He was wonderful.

LEO
He did that exact trick.

GIRL
And handsome.

LEO
He was handsome.

SMILES
Oh yeah? What was this handsome clown's name?

LEO
Blinko. Why didn't we get Blinko, Mommy?

A WAITING ROOM

DORRIS is a beautiful secretary. She sensually smokes a cigarette. SMILES enters.
I shower in the dark now.
The light makes everything too easy;
it hides the truth.
So it is in the dark that I sit
at the bottom of this cement tomb,
warm water beating down against my back.
I fumble for the pretty pink razor I bought
in a pack of ten at the drugstore yesterday--
with ten tries, how can I fail?
This is an art, I tell myself,
letting loose the rivers of my body,
waiting for the water to run cold.

Dorris?

Is that you, Smiles?

Blinko?

He's in there.

I've missed you.

I've missed you too.

SMILES punches his hand. He heads towards a door leading into BLINKO'S office. DORRIS stares at SMILES. SMILES gives a smile to DORRIS as he opens the door and enters the office.

INNER OFFICE

BLINKO, a dark clown with an afro wig and a leather jacket, sits on top of his desk, anticipating SMILES'S entrance. SMILES stops dead in his tracks once he sees BLINKO.

Blinko.

BLINKO

(calmly)

Hello, Smiles.

SMILES

Silence as the two eye each other. Tension is adrift in the air. You could cut it with a knife. BLINKO takes a large gun out of his desk and
lays it on the desk.

BLINKO
Nice of you to drop in.

SMILES
Blinko....

BLINKO
Since I came back in town, I was wondering when you were going to square things up.

SMILES
When I was going to square things up?

BLINKO
Yeah.

SMILES
When I... You gotta lotta nerve coming back here.

DORRIS enters with coffee.

DORRIS
I thought you clowns might be thirsty.

SMILES looks at DORRIS with a pained expression on his face. BLINKO notices.

BLINKO
She's mine, Smiles.
(DORRIS looks up)

SMILES
You stole her from me, Binko, just like the championship clown-off.

Water
Pamela R. Gourley
—for Sylvia

I.
There were those frosty winter nights, the thin white layers among the fallen leaves, when I was frightened of the moon and those dark shadows lingering in my room. Like a ghost, I crept softly along plush carpet, polished wood, fresh linoleum, then waterweeds; the soft white cotton of my nightgown flowing behind me like dreams. Ah, the river, gentle, enticing.

II.
Naked, the remains of my baby fat crumple around my knees and across my stomach, the wrinkles magnified by the shallow pool water. I'm sitting on the first step, my mother's back turns. I descend head-first and float on the surface, how easy! Have I become an angel?

III.
I move the wet cloth over the swells of my new breasts, then across the perspiration of my neck and forehead. Why hadn't I been born a boy? I roll over, water spills from the sides of the white marble tub; I swallow. God, may this be my communion cup, may this be my baptism.
were looking forward to these drivers coming home again. The women who fixed their makeup and the men who shaved in traffic amused Wayne.

Every once in a while, Wayne and his family would be interrupted during dinner by someone who had run out of gas or lost a hubcap. After Wayne showed them to the phone in the kitchen, he often invited his new friend to stay and have dinner with his family. This did not please Nancy, but this way, Wayne could really learn about the wonderful faces that he saw every day.

After months of watching the freeway, Wayne began to forget about his life at home. He made up stories in his head about the men who passed by in big Volvos. They were going to see their newborn baby in the hospital, to inform their wife that they had been laid off, or going to visit a prostitute before going home to a dying mother.

Nancy hated the freeway. She began to give up hope that Wayne would ever pay attention to his family again. She saw his longing to be part of the glorious rush-hour traffic, and Nancy could not understand it at all. Many nights she argued with him that it was just a road, but to him, it was more than a road. At night when they lay in bed, Nancy could almost feel his thoughts: they were far away in the middle of a car crash or a traffic jam.

When the dirty brown truck broke down right in front of Wayne's home, he was immediately on the scene. Nancy was watching from the kitchen window. He had run up the hill; speaking rapidly, he shook the driver's hand. Together the two husky men lifted the hood of the car and pointed to different gadgets inside. When the freeway patrolman finally arrived hours later, Wayne and the truck driver had already bonded over several cans of beer.

Still smiling as he walked back to the house that night, Wayne decided he was ready to leave. When his two children and his wife had fallen asleep, Wayne took his coat and wallet and walked out to the side of the freeway. He stuck his thumb up, and in less than an hour, he was riding away.

BLINKO
What do you want from me?

SMILES
You know what I want.

BLINKO
Yeah.

BLINKO stands, goes to the door and closes it. BLINKO directs DORRIS to sit in a chair. She looks uncomfortable.

BLINKO
You want it, come and get it.

Music starts BLINKO and SMILES glare at each other. Both begin to perform different tricks, trying to outdo each other for DORRIS. At first she looks very nervous, but soon a smile appears on her face. BLINKO grows tired and grabs the gun off of his desk. He points it at SMILES. SMILES glares at BLINKO. DORRIS covers her eyes.

SMILES
I beat you, Blinko. You know I did. You cheated me at the National Clown-off and you went to Vegas and took all my glory. You took my girl. You left me here, doing the birthday party circuit. But you know something, it was all worth it. 'Cause now we both know the truth.

DORRIS
Oh, Smiles.

BLINKO
Say good-bye, Dorris, to your friend.

BLINKO laughs excitedly. SMILES attacks BLINKO, knocking the gun
from his hand. They wrestle each other. DORRIS isn't sure what to do. BINKO finally grabs hold of the gun.

BINKO
Smile, Smiles. This is the best part of your show. The end.

Silence. BINKO slowly pulls the trigger and out pops a flag that says "The End" on it. BINKO'S eyes grow wide in disbelief. DORRIS latches on to SMILES. SMILES lights up a cigarette and exits the office with a huge smile on his face. Steven Sondheim's "SEND IN THE CLOWNS" plays.

FADE OUT
The Face of My Mother
Jori Frakie

Over the years, tears have worn deep channels into the tired skin of my mother's cheeks. These riverbeds, fecund with the elusive mystery of past, have carved away flesh and confidence, and in their banks of loam, have buried youth.

As a child, I traced each rivulet from source to final pool and marveled that moss did not grow in the trenches. I fingered the dirt and rock of her cheekbones and wondered whether I, too, would someday have skin like hers, organic and sodden with tears.

Today, the mirror shows my jaw to be smooth; free of streams and furrows. But when I see myself, in dreams, or in thoughts, I see on my body the face of my mother. And I taste on my lips the salt of her tears.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jori Frankie: The Face of My Mother</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill Warsett: Destinations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela R. Gourley: Water</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare Nathan: Garry and Etta</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alana Naughtin: The Garden</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mika Perrine: Warmth</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh Ben Friedman: Blinko's Back</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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