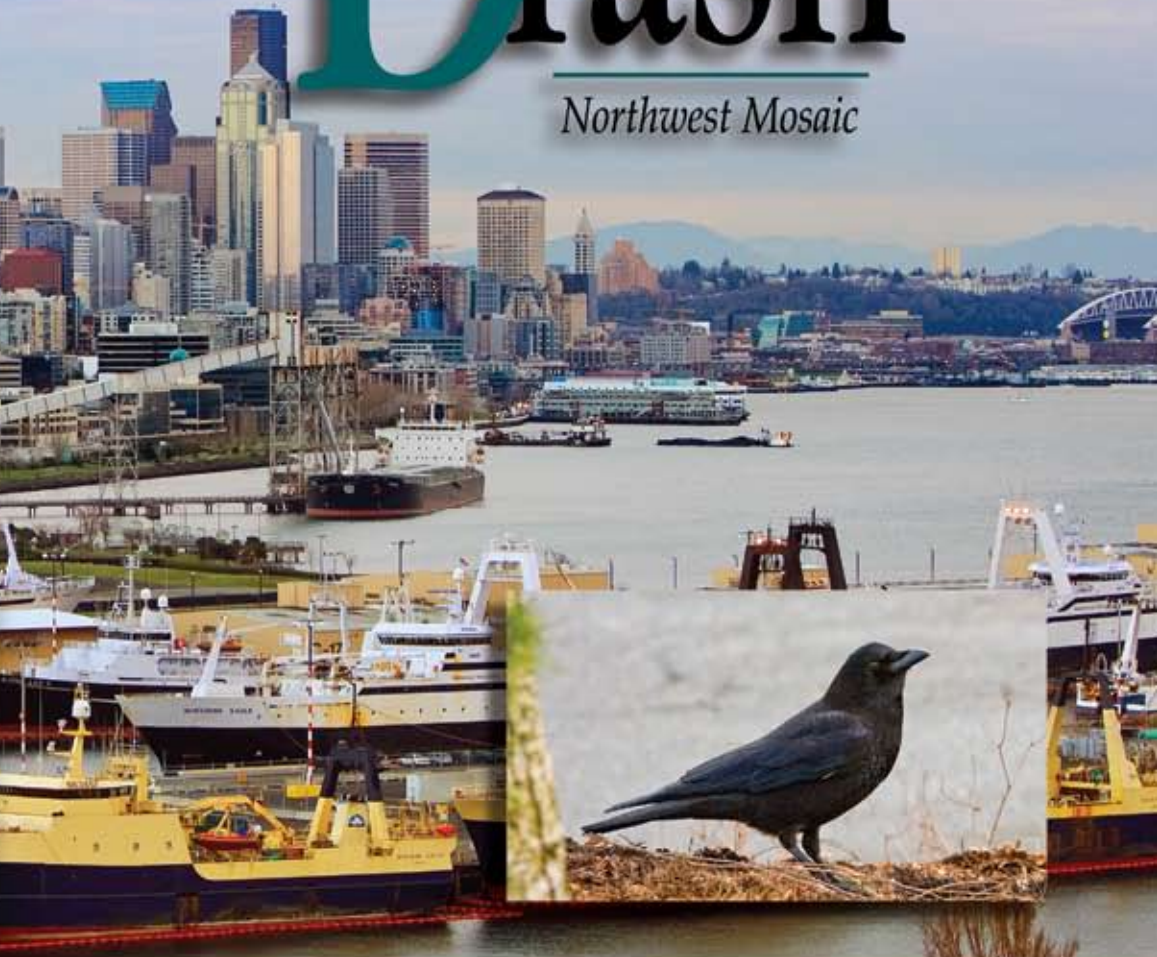


דרש Drash

Northwest Mosaic



2008-5768 / Volume Two

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W

elcome to Volume Two.

After the thrilling birth of *Drash: Northwest Mosaic* last year, our infant review has pulled itself upright, bypassed walking, and gone directly into a run. There's been great interest from writers and readers throughout United States, Canada and Israel. We are grateful for all the submissions, support and subscriptions.

Our second issue features some old friends from Volume One and some intriguing new company. The luminous writing of Gretchen Flesher, Tacoma, Washington, came to our attention after she received second place in the 2007 Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction, *Nimrod International Journal*.

David B. Williams, who writes about nature in urban settings, grew up in the Temple Beth Am community. He shares his crow stories. (Everyone has one: I stepped out of shul after services last Pesach and watched a crow pull a full-sized 7x7-inch matzoh out of the garbage and try to take flight before resignedly dragging it across the entire parking lot.)

We welcome poets from Oregon, California, Mexico, and British Columbia. Maureen Sherbondy's poem "Tashlich," comes to us from her new volume, *Praying in Coffee Shops*, fitting for Northwesterners, though she makes her home in North Carolina! Seattle's former poet populist Pasha Gertler addresses poverty, poetry and tradition. Boise, Idaho rabbi, Dan Fink, gives us a poem for the New Year, and we laud Frances Behar Israel, who, after sitting shiva for husband David in December 2007, stepped back into literary life with the submission "Noah."

You won't think of the HIV/AIDS virus in quite the same way after reading La Jolla, California, medical writer Vishwas Gaitonde's "The Viral Mirror," with its "unwelcome guests with master keys."

As the "Israel at 60" celebrations get underway, enjoy the striking photographs taken by Portland's Rachel Wolf during her visit to Kiryat Malachi. We also fete Ruth Fast, who came to Israel from Germany as a bright-eyed fifteen-year-old with Youth Aliyah. Ruth's saga can be found at the end of this volume in a new section, "A Great Story to Tell." We seek great personal stories for Volume Three.

While *Drash's* funding and mission require a tilt toward work from the Northwest and/or with Jewish content, we embrace writers and readers of all persuasions. The pages of *Drash: Northwest Mosaic* celebrate the voice that urges us to pay attention, the inner imperative to learn and engage with our craft and the world.

Wendy Marcus
Drash Editor

After the Garden

Fresh water pearls
lined up for display, new
recruits whistle-clean
ready. Fear residue on tongues,
rusted filings sharp iron
dark spinach, raw.
A tank, gossamer curtain
of illusion, fractures a patch
of ground. Fought over, it will not
nurture plump apricots, a kibbutz,
families fleeing other granaries
of bones, orchards of blood.
Each generation since Eve
condemned to wander
swats buzzing flies, boards
crowded caravans, buses.
Wailers at the wall,
muezzin in mosques,
the *Adban*, the *Sb'ma*
mixed voices same roots, shotgun
banter of jackhammers, bulldozers.
Quiet is an artifact of history.
Peace, a fig leaf
of daily dreams.

Unruly Daughters

What am I to do with you, my unruly daughters,
poking your faces out of the curtains,
screwing up our carefully rehearsed play?
Look at that pink face popped out between
the red fans of the bamboo,
or that little devil in her purple leotard
tap-dancing in the rose bush,
or the triplets in yellow flight suits
jumping Double Dutch on the pansies.
Even the baby's got into it,
playing hide and seek in the maple.
You were planted in careful stripes
on the sunny side,
before the mugo pine and burning bush,
in between heather and lavender,
and you were supposed to grow up there,
snuggly in your womb of loam and mulch,
tickled all winter by record-breaking rain.

And grow you did, my tulip daughters,
bold as Bella Abzug, sensuous as Sophia Loren
in your peach-sashed pinks,
in your white silks billowing,
shaking your hips in black and gold.
But you defied my best laid plans
and perched in the unexpected —
nubile and unruly.
What would my clients think, passing by?
Nonetheless, I find myself rushing out
to take my tea with you
and see which origami you unfurled,

and some sweet something opens me,
and I hear the ghost of John Cage whistling,
and I see your random beauty,
startling as the unspooled ribbons
of Washington's tulip fields,
that vast expanse of conformists,
your cousins, actually, rallying full spectrum
in a grounded rainbow.

But you, my wild renegades,
were ovals of a dream
moved in the mouths of squirrels
(or so the nursery pundits say)
and by the way, who said you could hitch at your age?
And don't get any ideas from those anarchists
ringing their gentian bells
and waving their flag-filled totems,
blown into a life unplanned or planted.
But what can you expect from wood hyacinths
or that floozie iris drinking with the bees,
stealing kisses on the lips.
Next door and across the street
my neighbors' gardens are carefully wrought
into parcels and margins.
Do they creep outside and discipline
the likes of you under moonlight?

As for me, next year I'll seed recklessly,
starting your younger sisters
among each bush and tree,
and marvel at crazy geometries
opening in the sway of serendipity.

Devotion

ten little blue stems gather at sunset

the *minyan* stands tall

bends in unison

wispy heads bob to earth

then sky

then earth again

Tenants

There will be no eviction now. Despite
the splattered porch and scattering of twigs
and grasses on the deck, their tenancy
remains secure until the fledglings fly.

Their cozy niche is too hospitable
and needs a boarding up *before* the spring.
So my procrastination serves them well,
as if they knew I'd never get around
to it, which left them free to lay their eggs
and mess the porch with such impunity,
in all their repertoire, they have no songs
to sing about tomorrow. I remind them,
just because my stalling lets them live in peace,
like them I do not own, I only lease.

Purim This Year

I don't want to be Esther for Purim this year.
I've been Esther so long, I detest her.
Is there any shame in a girl being Hamen
Or Mordecai or a court jester?

I don't want to be Esther for Purim this year
'Cause I hate that old dress of my mother's.
I'd rather be king, or most anything,
And wear royal robes like my brother's.

I think I'll be Hamen for Purim this year.
My mom says I'm trying to test her.
You see, it is strange, since I chose to change
My brother has asked to be Esther!



The author and her brother, Bob, Union, NJ, 1955

*T*he Fleeting Quality of Happiness

Three weeks later,
The missing sock
The long, beige one
Gone AWOL in the laundry
(Mourned for, Dearly missed)
Finally Found!

Oh, Splendiferous Sock.
You match so many skirts and slacks.
How thrilled I am to see you
Clinging like a Joey to the pocket
Of my running pants.
Oh, happy reunion.
You sidle up in rolled bliss
To your partner, who
Waited like a war wife
In the far left corner
Of the sock drawer.

White with envy, a lone ankle sock
Peeks from beneath the heap
And deflates me with her piercing plea,
“But, oh, where is mine?”

Carpool

Mrs. Betty Stein turned her Chrysler Newport into the sloping driveway, coasted halfway down its length, and stopped. She gave two quick beeps on the dignified horn and waited. From the radio, softly, a tired instrumental version of "Blue Skies" barely touched her consciousness. Betty was not, by nature, an early riser. For her, the morning's freshness was best appreciated in bed, or, if necessary, overlooking the wooded backyard from the kitchen table while drinking a cup of freshly-ground coffee.

She'd drive through this chore on automatic.

From the brick house's carport door, her first rider, Isaac, emerged. A notebook and texts under one arm, his sack lunch held in the other hand, he walked toward the car with the quick steps of a shore bird. Short and thin, looking closer to eleven than his fourteen years, Isaac seemed the exact opposite of Mrs. Stein's son. Like his father, her Craig had a broad smile, sturdy physique, and open manner. Isaac, she knew, was quieter, more introspective, and brighter in a bookish way.

She felt sorry for him.

When Isaac reached the car, he instinctively moved toward the back door, but as he touched the handle, he noticed Craig was not on the passenger side of the front seat. Isaac hesitated. Mrs. Stein appeared to be hand-motioning to him. Did she prefer for him to sit up front? Or maybe she was just indicating for him to open the back door. He couldn't tell what she wanted. He could never tell what his friends' parents wanted. Although he thought Mrs. Stein was a nice person, he'd always felt uncomfortable around her. As a kid, when using her garden hose for a water stop on hot summer days or when knocking on the Steins' front door for Halloween treats, he'd been intimidated by her tall, full frame, her haughty looks.

Watching him waver like a mechanical doll, Betty exhaled with a sigh. She didn't have all day for this. And now she saw him pull back, startled, when she lowered the passenger window with the power control on her door's armrest. "Come in, Isaac," she said as nicely as possible to the wide-eyed youngster. "Sit up front."

Isaac shifted his lunch bag, opened the heavy door, and mumbled a hello. Leaning forward he saw that Mrs. Stein was not wearing the kind of dress mothers are supposed to have on when they pick you up for school. Instead she wore a flowery-patterned robe. Balancing his lunch and books, he tried not to stare. Wasn't she breaking a law or something? What if they went through a stop sign and got caught by a policeman: Would she get arrested for indecent exposure? Would he get arrested for something murky he didn't fully understand?

Closing the door, Isaac directed all his attention to pressing the electric switch on his side to raise the window. It zipped right up like an elevator. Immediately, he wanted to crack the window open and let in early spring's crisp morning air. The car smelled of stale tobacco, but at least Mrs. Stein wasn't smoking at the moment. Isaac came from a non-smoking household. Once or twice a year, his mother would light up after dining on a seafood plate at the Light House restaurant. She'd look funny, holding the cigarette as if it were a burning fuse about to go off. Isaac had seen Mrs. Stein smoke. She did it, he thought, with the unrushed style of an established Hollywood star.

"Isaac," Mrs. Stein said as she began backing up the driveway faster than his parents would have, "change the radio to another station if you like."

He nodded. With her high frosted hair and the smooth, elegant robe, Mrs. Stein looked aristocratic. Still, it was a bathrobe. Isaac didn't want to reach over to the radio and have to lean toward her. Yet he didn't want to act inappropriately by not following her suggestion.

He pressed one of the buttons, and the sounds of Bob Dylan's raspy voice came on in mid-song. Dylan was describing the many ways people had to "stone you." As Mrs. Stein drove down the curving street, past three- and four-bedroom ranch-style homes on expansive tree-filled lots, Isaac wondered if she was listening to the song. Could she hear and understand the lyrics that even Isaac only vaguely understood, or did she just follow the rough and tumble tune?

Actually, Betty was thinking vaguely about Craig. "He said he had a stomachache," she told Isaac, who hadn't asked for an explanation of Craig's absence. "But he didn't have a fever. I felt his forehead, and it was cool. I'll give him the day off, but tomorrow he's back in school."

Isaac could understand Craig's wanting to skip classes. Once in a while he also enjoyed staying away, sleeping late, watching old movies on television. But Craig was probably dodging an English or a history test. Academics were not his strong point.

"Are you and Craig in any of the same classes, Isaac?" Betty asked as they neared Eddie Shapiro's house, a two-story colonial, the neighborhood's grandest home.

"No, we aren't," Isaac said diplomatically. Craig sat in classes for, well, the less-gifted pupils, while Isaac took the more advanced courses. Although Craig and he lived within a few blocks of each other, they rarely did things together anymore. During elementary school days they'd ridden bikes, speeding down the street's steepest hills, had tumbled about in the occasional winter snow, had played touch-football and softball. They'd even been part of the Bar Mitzvah-in-training assembly line, going to Hebrew school to get the religious education their parents had never had. Now, in their first year of high school, they'd gone their separate ways. Craig was an athlete, Isaac part of the intelligentsia. Craig already had a girlfriend, pretty but empty-headed Sally Kaufman. Isaac had noticed girls, but he didn't know what to say to them.

At Eddie's, Betty glided down the straight driveway, stopping close to the formally designed house. It always took two series of strong horn blasts to gain Eddie's attention. He claimed he couldn't hear the honking; she knew punctuality was not in his vocabulary. Eddie was the biggest member of the neighborhood's teen group. Even in elementary school he'd always been at least a head taller than his classmates. But unlike Mrs. Stein's son, Eddie wasn't athletic. He was big but soft. Tall and aggressive. And protected.

It was Harriet, Eddie's mother, who had pushed this whole car-pool idea. Last fall when the five boys had started high school, she'd been the one to call up and organize the "sharing arrangement." In her Midville accent, considered deep Southern by Atlanta standards, Harriet had related how poor Eddie had to ride that bus for forty-five minutes. "And he jus' coul'n't geyet reddy in tahme an' woul'n't they lahke to geyet in a li'l ol' cahpool fo' th' boyees?"

Well, Harriet already knew Selma wanted one for Bernard, and Phyllis would do it for Andy. So would Isaac's mother, Jean. Now, did Betty want to include Craig in the group? Each mother would only have to drive one day a week, was that so bad? Let's see, Phyllis wanted Thursday since she had her hair done at nine and

could drive right over from the carpooling. And Selma said Monday was fine for her. Harriet herself would take Friday. Did Betty prefer Tuesday or Wednesday? The day left over was okay with Jean.

"Tuesday will do," Betty Stein had said. She'd never carpoled to school for her older son, Danny, when he'd been in ninth grade four years earlier, but now she dutifully added the morning ride to her other weekly trips for Craig: baseball practice, the club meetings, the dances. It seemed like a long two years until Craig and his friends would have their driver's licenses.

Eddie finally came running out of his house, down the wide entrance steps, moving his legs as though unused to the rapid pace. Behind him, from the door, Harriet in a beige silk robe was waving good-bye to her son and hello to Betty, who lowered her window and waved back, not fully hearing what Harriet was saying. Something about the fathers and sons getting together for their yearly weekend in the mountains. It was coming up and did Jerry have plans underway yet? Betty Stein knew her husband did the main organizing for the event, but she never interfered with the planning. She didn't need to remind him. And she didn't need Harriet to remind her to remind him.

Dressed casually but neatly in light cotton slacks, a navy blue windbreaker and a yellow button-down shirt, Eddie bounced into the back seat and closed the door too loudly. "Sorry, Mrs. Stein," he said, "I didn't hear you honk. Hey, Isaac, did you see 'Green Acres' last night?"

Isaac hadn't. "At least Eddie's enthusiastic," Betty mused as she backed out of the driveway. Harriet had popped back inside.

Eddie gave a detailed rundown on what Betty thought was the silliest program she'd ever seen (once was enough). This young man was exploring its "theater of the absurd qualities," a phrase that meant little to her, she admitted to herself.

"Isaac, you've got to watch it. It's the greatest show I've ever seen."

He promised he would.

Betty Stein turned onto Ridgeway, her next stop Bernie's house. She could have driven these neighborhood streets blindfolded. So could the other mothers.

Moving on to his next subject, Eddie was telling Isaac about a recent Tom Wolfe book. Did he mean Thomas Wolf, she wondered, or was this a new writer? More than others, some people just seemed to gravitate toward cultural ideas. Like Gerald, her brother-

in-law, and his artsy wife, Anna. They were chock-full of culture. And tonight they'd be over for a dinner whose main course Betty hadn't yet decided on. Whenever Jerry and she ate at Gerald and Anna's, they were treated to the latest in popular cuisine trends. Last year it had been Hungarian, more recently Peruvian. Betty actually liked the possibilities of chicken. Maybe she could make it Hawaiian-style.

She reached Bernie's modernistic flat-topped house, which didn't fit in with the more traditional peaked roofs of the surrounding homes. Since it was built closer to the street, she stopped on the roadway and honked.

"He's got a great style, Isaac," Eddie was saying. "Wolfe writes non-fiction but uses fiction techniques." Mrs. Stein couldn't believe Eddie's precociousness. He ought to come over for the dinner tonight. Gerald and Eddie could have a terrific conversation. For once the pressure would be off her having to pay attention to subjects she knew little about. And when everybody saw her husband's latest addition to the house, the gold-plated falcon poised right above the fireplace, what would they think?

"I don't know, Jerry," Betty had said last week when her husband screwed the massive bird into place.

"It's us, Betty. That's how tough we had to be to get as far as we have. Remember our start: you at the one cash register, me doing the selling and the ordering and the receiving." She tried to appreciate the bird's image, its head in profile to emphasize the sharp beak. The two-dimensional figure reminded her of Egyptian artifacts.

"Let's keep it up for a little while and see how it fits in," she offered, hoping she could talk Jerry into retiring the creature to the basement's playroom setting.

The conversation in the car continued. As Isaac turned to answer Eddie, he couldn't help noticing Mrs. Stein's slightly amused expression. She usually looked so serious, but this was less intimidating. He wanted to say something to her, a word to let her know he thought she was a nice person.

He had it.

"That's a neat robe, Mrs. Stein."

Her thank-you told him she'd not really heard. She was watching the house, for they were running late. Just as she was about to give the horn an extended blast, long-legged Bernie eased out his door and loped over to the car. He was graceful.

Isaac had hoped Eddie would slide over and end up directly behind him. When Bernie sat behind you, he played teasing games like flicking at your ear with his finger. But Eddie was preoccupied with one of his books and didn't notice Bernie's approach. Jogging around to the car's other side, he entered, said a quick good morning, and placed himself right behind Isaac.

"Craig got a hangover, Mrs. Stein?" Bernie asked. He'd brought a thin notebook, but no books.

"No, Bernard," said Betty checking her laughter as she pulled away from the curb, "a stomach virus."

"And an American history test," said Bernie in a stage whisper.

One more rider needed to be picked up before they took the three-mile drive to school. Andy's tri-level rested on the corner boundary of the neighborhood. There was a kidney-shaped pool fenced off in the back. A few years ago Eddie's family had put in the area's first pool, and within a year or two a dozen more appeared throughout the neighborhood.

Like fancy gopher holes, Betty thought. Her family also owned one, a deluxe, self-cleaning, Caribbean Dream model. "A great training resource for the boys," Jerry had said.

Before she could honk at the Hoffman's house, their maid came outside and waved toward the car. In a mildly apologetic tone mixed with a dash of amusement, she explained that Andy had overslept and his mother would have to take him "as soon as that lazy boy is ready."

"Too much late-night partying going on around here," said Bernie to the group. Mrs. Stein thanked the maid and followed the curve of the drive back onto the street.

"Maybe we should get a reward just for making it to school, right, Eddie?" Bernie nudged his backseat companion, who weakly agreed.

To direct attention away from Bernie the Pest, Eddie asked Isaac to turn up the radio. "It's Simon and Garfunkel."

Isaac liked the song "Sounds of Silence," and he wanted to comply with Eddie's request, but he hesitated. Should he ask Mrs. Stein first or just go into action? He pursed his lips. Ask her, he told himself.

"Mrs. Stein," Eddie asked before Isaac could speak up, "can Isaac turn up that song?"

Driving down Wesley Road, Betty was considering poultry recipes — something Italian perhaps. She'd shop around this morning, show Ida how to prepare it, and, if Craig were actually sick, attend to him.

"Mrs. Stein?" Eddie called again.

What did he want from the back seat? She glanced in the rear-view mirror. "Yes, Eddie."

This was Isaac's chance. For a reason he couldn't fully explain, it was important for him to make the request. He'd break in: "Eddie wants — "

"He wants you to turn up the radio," inserted Bernie, louder and faster than Isaac dared.

"Isaac, if you want the radio louder, just turn it up. You don't have to ask me for every little thing, do you?"

Why was Mrs. Stein picking on him? Isaac wanted to call "foul." It was Eddie who wanted to hear the song, which was almost over anyway. Sighing, he turned the knob a touch.

"Louder, please," requested Eddie. "Put it on the back speakers." Isaac paused, trying to figure out how to direct sound to the rear. "Try the knob on the tuner side," Eddie offered, drumming his fingers on his copy of Hemingway's short stories.

"Isaac, you want me to do it?" Bernie asked in a too helpful voice. He leaned forward to lend assistance. Plopping a left arm on the top of the front seat, Bernie curved his other arm over to exactly to the right spot.

"Hey!" A quick sting shot through Isaac's ear. "Hey!"

Bernie bounced back into his seat. "Just trying to help, Isaac."

"Boys, sit down and hush up!"

Mrs. Stein was definitely angry. Isaac rubbed his ear and lowered his eyes. In his pain and embarrassment, he found himself staring at his physical science book. The cover's photomontage of an atom, enlarged, juxtaposed to the sun in eclipse, was showing signs of wear. The book had been new last fall.

"If we don't have better behavior here, I'll put the radio on my station," lectured Mrs. Stein. "Or do you boys want to start riding the bus again?"

No one said a word, but Bernie was snickering. He reminded Isaac of a weasel, a handsome but conniving weasel.

Eddie cleared his throat and quietly, politely, asked if the rear speakers could be turned on. Without a word Betty gave a twist to the proper knob, and the back speakers perked up to the soul music of The Temptations.

"That's better," said Bernie, dancing in his seat, but not moving vigorously enough to annoy their driver.

"Can you hear okay, Isaac?" he asked in a concerned voice.

Isaac didn't answer. He wanted to make amends now, for he was convinced Mrs. Stein's opinion of him was at an all-time low. He looked out the window at the passing greenery, the thickening bushes and forest of pine trees hiding stately mansions visible only during the winter months. Budding pink and yellow-flowered dogwoods would soon reign throughout the city.

This was Isaac's favorite roller-coaster stretch of Wesley, where the rod-straight road took a series of long rises and falls, and cars naturally sped from hill crest to hill crest. He glanced back at the two rear passengers. The luxury car offered front and back armrests tucked into the seats. Theirs was down, a territorial marker. On his side Bernie was content to sway and to snap his fingers to the bouncy music. Eddie read Hemingway.

"Mrs. Stein?"

"Hmmm?" What did that timid Isaac want this time? She was approaching Northside Drive, which led to the high school.

Isaac rubbed his chin, glanced at his books. "I was wondering where you lived before you moved over here to the northwest side of town?"

"Where did I live?" she asked back, not kindly, for Isaac had interrupted her menu planning ("Forget chicken. Maybe they'd like pepper steak."). He felt her lack of interest and regretted having asked the question.

Yet then she actually started to answer him in a conversational tone. Watching the road she said, "We were over on the northeast side just like your family."

It was Isaac's turn. "We were in the Rock Springs Apartments until I was six."

"Yes," she answered, "and Craig lived a mile or so away on Chalmette."

"Near my grandmother's apartment."

Mrs. Stein's Chrysler was stopped at the red light. Ahead of her some seniors in a red GTO were also obviously listening to rock music.

Isaac tapped his foot, but not to the beginning of a Beatles' tune; his foot moved instead to his mind's rhythmic search for a way to continue the conversation.

"We lived on Morningside when I was a kid," Bernie joined in, leaning forward. Isaac involuntarily hunched up, waiting for the inevitable ear-strike.

It didn't come. Sometimes the waiting was worse than the actual event. Isaac wondered if Bernie was crafty enough to realize that.

Eddie looked up from his short story to say, "We lived on Druid Hills."

"That's right," said Mrs. Stein. "Most of the families now out here were first over on the northeast."

"My mother calls our neighborhood The Ghetto," said Isaac, who immediately doubted he should have volunteered that news.

"It's an upper-middle-class ghetto, a ghetto of choice," Eddie pointed out. "We can leave whenever we wish."

"I wonder why it turned out that way?" Isaac asked.

"If this light doesn't change, you boys are going to be late." Betty found herself wondering why the neighborhood was overwhelmingly Jewish. When the roads and houses were being built five to ten years ago, no sign inviting Jews to move here had been posted.

There was no previous Jewish presence. In fact, just the opposite. The older bounded streets were almost exclusively Gentile. Jews like to be among Jews, she concluded.

"Upward mobility," said Eddie. "Bigger new homes on bigger lots than on the northeast side. By the way, my home-room teacher doesn't care if we're late."

"Mine does," said Isaac, gripping his books. He had something else he wanted to say: "When my family first moved here," he addressed them all, as if he were giving a school report, "when we first moved in and Margaret Mitchell stopped at a dead end and your houses were just woods, there was a big real estate sign at the end of the street that called our development Cherokee Forest."

"Yeah," added Eddie, "their tribe used to live all around here."

Bernie was actually listening to the references as though he were learning something. He even added his own bit of folklore: "There was a rundown shack behind our place, back in the woods. Hobos lived there. Near the creek."

Betty found herself following all this closely as she turned onto Northside and approached the school grounds.

"They fought the Battle of Atlanta on the hills around our houses," Isaac said.

"There were picket lines all along the ridge."

"Oh?" Betty doubted this was true. She found the boys' references a bit far-fetched. Pulling into the school's entrance, she followed the other carpoolers readying to deposit their loads. Just like being at an airport terminal, she thought. And this is first-class delivery service. She'd walked to Girls High, just as you were supposed to so you could tell your kids, later, how hard it'd been in the old days. Actually, the half-mile walk hadn't really been so bad, except on rainy winter days.

"There was also an old shack in the woods near our house," continued Isaac. "A Negro couple lived there till ten years ago when the area was starting to get built up. Now it's all burned-up ruins. And I also know about a fire engine graveyard, and where a ferry crossed the Chattahoochee. And the site of an old mill."

"Isaac," — Mrs. Stein looked at him — "how do you know all this?" They'd reached the curb, but no one opened a door. All wanted to hear Isaac's answer.

He shrugged. "I don't know, I just know it."

"Well, Isaac," said Mrs. Stein with the friendliest expression he'd ever seen on her face, "you're our ghetto historian."

He didn't know what to say. Behind them an unloaded station wagon honked an appeal for Mrs. Stein's group to begin exiting.

"All right." She refused to be hurried by the other driver.

Bernie opened his door. Eddie did the same.

"Thanks for the ride," they called to Mrs. Stein. Now that Bernie was preceding him into the red-bricked building, Isaac could relax. "Thanks for the ride," he said as he gathered his books and lunch.

"You're welcome, Isaac. Have a good day in school."

"I hope Craig gets better."

"He will. He won't have any choice."

The station wagon had backed up enough to angle around the Chrysler, and the driver, a suited businessman, frowned at them as he jerked past. Mrs. Stein ignored him.

Isaac stayed by the idling car. Just before he closed the door he said, "That's a pretty robe, Mrs. Stein."

"Why thank you, Isaac."

As Betty pulled away from the curb, she watched Isaac scoot to catch up with Eddie, whose hand rose and fell like a conductor's while he explained one more of his theories. They joined the students funneling into the side entrance, and Mrs. Stein thought she saw Bernie pivoting, maneuvering between kids to circle behind Isaac. But too many students massed in between, and for once Isaac entered the high school undisturbed.

Waiting to make the turn back onto Northside Drive, competing now with cars destined for downtown, Mrs. Betty Stein considered another possibility for dinner. Why of course — Southern-fried chicken. Add mashed potatoes, gravy, black-eyed peas. But to make it really interesting, start with matzoh ball soup, her mother's recipe. Perfect, but why hadn't she thought of that before?

Easing onto Northside, she tried to imagine who had once lived or fought where her home now stood: Indians and soldiers moving among the pines that would someday be a housing subdivision tinted Jewish. Yes, tonight as she served hot buttered biscuits, for once she'd have something different to talk about: local history. The radio still tuned to the rock station, she drove smoothly back home, no, not to a ghetto of choice, but to her community in Cherokee Forest.

White Secrets

I lost my twin Lu during our last night swim together. I don't mean that she died. My belly rose out of the black saltwater that night, a round white moon. It glowed in the August air. Lu stared at it. Our dark hair reached out like tentacles and intertwined on the surface of the water.

"Scared, Laura?" she said.

We held our freckled arms out to keep afloat. I looked at hers, the same as mine, and glanced away from her. Up on the bank our house was a small shadow. Mom and Dad were sleeping or whispering in the shadows of their bedroom.

"Scared?" Lu repeated. I could still see her watching the infant in my stomach. Lu always knew when I was scared, or by asking convinced me that I should be. "Scared?" she had said when she moved to a special class in elementary, leaving me alone in ours. We were in third grade and she still couldn't read. "Scared?" she said when I left on my first date with James. "Scared?" she said when we snuck away from our parents in church and climbed the narrow winding stairs of the high steeple, and found ourselves alone in the very top that shifted in the wind. "Scared?" she must have said when she left our mother's womb without me. "Yes," I had said. "Yes."

"No. I'm not scared," I said that August night.

Her brows furrowed, and she kicked away from me.

* * *

We were ten years old the first time we snuck down to the beach at night to swim. I woke to Lu standing wide-eyed in the bedroom we shared. We could have slept separately. There was another bedroom in the house, but I didn't like to be alone in the dark. Lu hardly slept at all, and when I woke to her standing next to our bed, she said, "Let's swim."

It was only 10:30. I had hardly begun to sleep, so I rolled easily away from the wall, over the warm place Lu had left, to the edge of the bed. She grabbed my hand and pulled me out of our room, through the small kitchen where bowls of beach glass and agates glowed dimly on the windowsill, and out the sliding glass door that was never locked.

The water of southern Puget Sound is cold even in late summer, and the night Lu first woke me it was only June. Each bleached oyster shell shone like a lamp against the darkness of the beach. My teeth clicked against each other as I followed Lu into the bay. Our white nightgowns were a puddle of pale light on the beach rocks. That night Lu began staying under as long as she could, and while she practiced I swam near her, reaching my arms down toward rocks and shells below. We swam, our identical feet kicking, our identical lungs expanding, our identical hands cupped like fins, our identical dark hair spreading in the saltwater behind us. Underwater I felt like I was nowhere, and there was no sky, no place without water anywhere. We ran back to the house laughing, naked white secrets in the dark.

* * *

By the night of that swim in August, Lu could stay under for a long time. After she had paddled away, she sank beneath and disappeared.

"Lu," I called out. I hated being left alone in the water.

She didn't hear me.

"Lu!"

I began to swim towards shore. The air was barely warm and the stars were far away. Lu surfaced beside me.

"You are scared," she said.

I didn't answer. We floated again for so long I felt no water beneath us, only depth.

"Where's James?" Lu said.

"He's gone."

"Where?"

"He's gone, Lu. It doesn't matter."

He was in California by then, studying psychology where it is warm.

Lu liked James because he never asked her questions the way my other classmates would, thinking they needed to include her because she didn't speak to them. He would just pass her the popcorn when we watched movies, nudge her in the hallway at school, and bring her issues of *National Geographic*. When it got warm in the spring, the three of us sat on the deck in the afternoons. James and I would be studying *The Grapes of Wrath* or pre-calculus, and Lu would stare her way through *National Geographic*, pausing to look at the text the same way she looked at each photograph.

* * *

I got cold sooner than usual that August night.

"I'm getting out," I said shivering.

I swam to shore on my back and wrapped up in my old towel. The small rocks beneath me moved and took my shape as I sat with my knees up.

Lu was treading water. She would sink below over and over, and rise up again to float. She knew I would wait. I watched Lu's body appear and disappear in the night water and thought of the small hidden body swimming in me.

When I told Mom and Dad I was pregnant, Mom reached out to touch my stomach. Dad looked both amused and embarrassed, the same look he'd had when he came down to the beach one day to call us in to dinner and Lu and I, at fourteen, were lying on the warm beach rocks with our shirts off. Usually Mom came to find us after that.

I never had to tell Lu that I was pregnant. She knew. She knows who is in and who is out. She knows which chairs people sit in and how they sit. She knows I have a cold before I even notice my nose getting stuffy. She knows who smokes at school and who is missing from class. She knows middle names, even if she can't read them, or spell them, or sound them out.

In April, a week before I told our parents, Lu and I were sitting in the grass of our yard, hugging our knees, and looking down at the seabirds on the water. I wasn't showing yet.

"Got a baby?" she asked.

I hardly stopped to wonder how she knew. She must have seen my hand linger over my belly, or maybe something crept into my voice when I spoke to James. It could have been that my breathing changed.

"In December I will," I said. "She'll be something."

That was when I knew there was a baby beneath my skin, but I couldn't imagine her outside of it. That was when I still believed that when my baby was finally born and cried, Lu would love her. Lu loves things that cry. Seagulls are her favorite animals, and she can watch women in movies break down for hours.

* * *

Lu rose to the surface again.

"Come on, Lu. I'm cold," I said.

She went under and came towards me. As she neared I could see her pale arms pushing the clear water behind her. She swam to the shallows at my feet and stood in it up to her knees, not shivering. When she is happy she splashes me with both arms.

Instead, that night she said, "You should be scared."

"I'm not."

"You should be. She's coming out."

I hugged both arms over my stomach. "She has to come out. We came out, Lu."

"James know?"

I cringed, looked over her white shoulder where the moonlight blurred on the surface of the water, and shook my head.

I never told James. After graduation I stopped seeing him. It would have been hard to hide. He came over one last time in June. We took a walk on the beach in the late afternoon when the sun was golden on leaves and tree trunks. I wore loose clothes and we laughed while I joked about eating too much during finals and gaining weight. James threw rocks at Mount Rainier, miles and miles away. They landed in the water. I sat down behind him, squinting, loving his arms and the story he was telling.

I let him help me up and kiss me when he turned around. If I hadn't I might have started talking. I might have told him. I held his hand on the way back to the house, but when we came to the path that leads up our bank into the yard, I stopped.

"James," I said. I remember how he looked, warm, and brown, and confused.

"That was it, James."

Walk fast, James, I thought. Walk fast or you'll find out and everything will stop for you, or it will all come too soon and you won't even know what you wanted. I stood and stared for a long time after he walked reluctantly away. I stared until the water was inseparable from the rocks in my vision and the only thing I could feel was the place on the underside of my wrist where he had last reached out to touch me. I stood so long all the colors faded to evening, and then Lu came.

"James went home," she said.

I nodded.

* * *

That night of our swim in August Lu was standing as still as a piling in the water. Her dark hair disappeared against the backdrop of the night.

"Not twins anymore," she said. Her posture didn't straighten or give.

"We are too," I said, and felt like a child.

"No."

I wanted to argue and I wanted to yell, "I know!" I wanted to push her back under the surface where she wouldn't point things out. I wanted to grab her hand and hold it up palm against palm to mine; they're the same. I wanted to show her my shoulder, trace its identical curve. I wanted to tuck our hair back to show our ears. *Our* ears, our ears, they're the same. I wanted to stand next to her and bend us down towards our ankles, the same bony ankles, but I knew if I did I wouldn't even be able to see mine because of this belly, because of my baby. It was in me, not in her. A whole womb full of difference.

I stood up slowly. I could see the saltwater dripping from her elbows and hair. She blinked, and I said what I was not allowed to say.

“You’re scared, Lu.”

She shook her head, but I knew I was right because she shook it too long. Leaning back against the new weight of my belly and clutching my towel at my throat, I turned and carefully walked up the low bank to our small, unlit house.

I don’t know what Lu did after I left her standing knee-deep in dark water, but I think she swam. I think she stayed down longer than ever. I think she practiced sticking her stomach out to see if just maybe she was wrong. I think she walked out into water so deep only her head stood above the surface like a seal’s, and then she swam until the sky was paler than the trees again and the light told her to come home.