

Museum

On the morning of the Käthe Kollwitz exhibit, a young man and woman come into the museum restaurant. She is carrying a baby; he carries the air-freight edition of the Sunday *New York Times*. She sits in a high-backed wicker chair, cradling the infant in her arms. He fills a tray with fresh fruit, rolls, and coffee in white cups and brings it to the table. His hair is tousled, her eyes are puffy. They look like they were thrown down into sleep and then yanked out of it like divers coming up for air. He holds the baby. She drinks coffee, scans the front page, butters a roll and eats it in their little corner in the sun. After a while, she holds the baby. He reads the *Book Review* and eats some fruit. Then he holds the baby while she finds the section of the paper she wants and eats fruit and smokes. They've hardly exchanged a look. Meanwhile, I have fallen in love with this equitable arrangement, and with the baby who cooperates by sleeping. All around them are faces Käthe Kollwitz carved in wood of people with no talent or capacity for suffering who are suffering the numbest kinds of pain: hunger, helpless terror. But this young couple is reading the Sunday paper in the sun, the baby is sleeping, the green has begun to emerge from the rind of the cantaloupe, and everything seems possible.

Calm

1

September sun, a little fog in the mornings. No sanctified terror. At night Luke says, "How do you connect a *b* to an *a* in cursive?" He is bent to the task with such absorption that he doesn't notice the Scarlatti on the stereo, which he would in other circumstances turn off. He has said that chamber music sounds to him worried. I go out and look at the early stars. They glow faintly; faintly the mountain is washed in the color of sunset, at that season a faded scarlet like the petals of the bougainvillea which is also fading. A power saw, somewhere in the neighborhood, is enacting someone's idea of more pleasure, an extra room or a redwood tub. It hums and stops, hums and stops.

2

In the dream there was a face saying no. Not with words. Brow furrow, crow's-feet, lip curl: no, it is forbidden to you, no. But it was featureless, you could put your hand through it and feel cold on the other side. It was not the father-face saying no among the torsos and the pillars of aluminum nor the mother-face weeping no, no, no at the gate that guards rage; it was not even the idiot face of the obedient brother tacking his list of a hundred and seventy-five reasons why not on the greenhouse door. This face spits on archetypes, spits on caves, rainbows, the little human luxury of historical explanation. The meadow, you remember the meadow? And the air in June which held the scent of it as the woman in religious iconography holds the broken son? You can go into that meadow, the light routed by a brilliant tenderness of green, a cool V carved by a muskrat in the blue-gray distance of the pond, black-eyed Susans everywhere. You can go there.

*Waiting***Peggy McNally**

Five days a week the lowest-paid substitute teacher in the district drives her father's used Mercury to Hough and 79th, where she eases it, mud flaps and all, down the ramp into the garage of Patrick Henry Junior High, a school where she'll teach back-to-back classes without so much as a coffee break and all of this depressing her until she remembers her date last night, and hopes it might lead to bigger things, maybe love, so she quickens her pace towards the main office to pick up her class

lists with the names of students she'll never know as well as she has come to know the specials in the cafeteria, where she hopes the coffee will be perking and someone will have brought in those doughnuts she's come to love so much, loves more than the idea of teaching seventh-graders the meaning of a poem, because after all she's a sub who'll finish her day, head south to her father's house, and at dinner, he'll ask her how her job is going, and she'll say okay, and he'll remind her that it might lead to a full-time position with benefits but she knows what teaching in that school is like, and her date from last night calls to ask if she's busy and she says yes because she's promised her father she'd wash his car and promises to her father are sacred since her mother died, besides it's the least she can do now that he lets her drive his car five days a week towards the big lake, to the NE corner of Hough and 79th and you know the rest.

This Is How I Remember It
Betsy Kemper

Watching Joey pop the red berries into his mouth like Ju-Ju Bees and Mags only licking them at first, then chewing, so both of their smiles look bloody and I laugh though I don't eat even one . . . then suddenly our moms are all around us (although mine doesn't panic till she looks at the others, then screams along with them things like *God dammit did you eat these?* and shakes me so my "No" sounds like "oh-oh-oh") and then we're being yanked toward the house, me for once not resisting as

my mother scoops me into her arms, and inside the moms shove medicine, thick and purple, down our throats in the bathroom; Joey in the toilet, Mags in the sink, me staring at the hair in the tub drain as my mom pushes my head down, and there is red vomit everywhere, splashing on the mirror and powder-blue rugs, everywhere except the tub where mine is coming out yellow, the color of corn muffins from lunch, not a speck of red, *I told you*, I want to scream, and then it is over and I turn to my mother for a touch or a stroke on the head like the other moms (but she has moved to the doorway and lights a cigarette, pushes hair out of her eyes) and there is only her smeared lips saying, *This will teach you anyway*.

*Changing the Channel***E. Ethelbert Miller**

My father and I have pillows behind our backs. The television is on but we talk without looking at each other. It is better this way, easier for my father to find words, which interrupt his breath like commercials. It is one of those strange moments when our small apartment in the Bronx is empty. My sister is on a date with a boy she can't bring home. My brother is at church lighting candles and saying prayers which will not lengthen his life. My mother is selecting lamb chops over pork in a

nearby store, and the price has nothing to do with our health. Now is the time when my father has a good job in the post office and this miracle of rest is what we share while watching old movies that offer no resemblance to who we are.