

REQUA

Tillie Olsen

It seemed he had had to hold up his head forever. All he wanted was to lie down. Maybe his uncle would let him, there in that strip of pale sun by the redwoods, where he might get warm.

I got those sittin kinks, too, his uncle said, but you don't see *me* staggerin round like an old drunk. . . Here, shake a leg and let's get wood for a fire. Dry pieces if there is any such. I'll catch the fish.

But he had to heave. Again.

You can't have 'ary a shred left to bring up. Remind me not to take you noplac but by streetcar after this. . . Alright, stretch out; you'll see you're feeling better.

Everything slid, moved, as if he were still in the truck. He had been holding up his head forever. The spongy ground squished under him, and the wet of winter and spring rains felt through the tarp. He was lying on the ground, *the ground*. There might be snakes. The trees stretched up and up so you couldn't see if they had tops, and up there they leaned as if they were going to fall. There hadn't even been time to say goodbye to the lamppost that he could hug and swing himself round and round. Round and round like his head, having to hold it up forever. Being places he had never been. Waiting moving sliding trying. Staying up to take care of his mother, afraid to lie down even if she was quiet, 'cause he might fall asleep and not hear her if she needed him.

Even the sun was cold. Wes took off his mackinaw and threw it over to him. He squinched himself together to try and fit under it. Moving sliding The road was never straight, the pickup bumped and bumped and he had to hold up his head. Even when he threw up, his uncle wouldn't stop. Maybe it was the whiskey they'd had when they got back from that place, made him sick. Or the up all night up and down sorting and packing, throwing away and loading. Then too dark on the auto ferry so he didn't even get to see the new bridge they were building, and anyway, that wet, hoo-hoo wind.

The trees *were* red, like blood that oozed out of old meat and nobody washed the plate. Under them waved - ferns? Baddream giant ones to the baby kind they put around flowers for too sick people.

He had been holding up his head forever. The creek was slipping and sliding too. His uncle came from nowhere and put three fishes too close to him on a rock. They flopped and moved their sides, trying hard to breathe like too sick people.

He pulled the tarp farther down to the next stripe of sun. A wind made

the skinny fire cough gallons of smoke and him shiver even more. Curling and curling till he got all in a ball under the mackinaw and didn't have to see or smell.

When he woke up, he was warm. Fog curled high between the trees, the light shone rosy soft like a bedroom lamp lit somewhere. By the fire, a harmonica in his hand, his uncle was sleeping. Across the creek, just like in the movieshow or in a dream, a deer and two baby deers were drinking. When he lifted his head, they lifted theirs. He and the doe looked into each others eyes for a long time. Then swift, beautiful, all were gone—but her eyes kept looking into his.

Wes was mad to have conked out like that. Six more hours to go—that's if this heap holds up and we don't get stuck 'hind a load going up a grade. I'll have to put out at work like always tomorrow, and it's sure not any restin we been doin these gone days.

Just like before, but colder. Moving sliding. Having to hold up his head. Bumroad twisty in a dark moving tunnel of trees. The lumber trucks screamed coming round the bends, and after it was dark their lights made the moving fog look scary. Sometimes he could sleep, sagged against his uncle who didn't move away. Cold or jolts would wake him. He didn't understand how it was that he was sitting up or why he didn't have a bed to lie down in or why or where he was going. All he wanted was to lie down

forever

■

A long bridge with standing stone bears. His uncle said: Klamath, almost there. (*Underneath in the night, yearling salmon slipped through their last fresh waters, making it easy to the salt ocean years.*) When the car stopped, there wasn't even a light to see by. A lady came out to help; the light from the open door made the dark stand taller than even the redwoods and *that* leaned like it might fall on him too. The wind or something blew away her words and his uncle's words. His feet were pins and needles too many boxes and bundles too many trips down and back a long hall like a cave. A feather cape or something hanging got knocked down. His head gasped back and forth like the sides of the fish on the rock Something about: we didn't throw away nothin well I'm sure not goin to miss where I've been hot milk or coffee? but he didn't answer, just lay down on a cot with the bundles stacked around him and went into a dream.

So he came to Requa March, 1932 14 years old.

■

He stands with his back clamped hard against the door Wes has left open, and he has jumped up from the cot to close.

Hey. Leave it open. My can's still draggin. A block behind.

(*No smile. Skinny little shrimp. Clutching at the door knob, knuckles white, nostrils flaring. Funny animal noises in his throat.*)

Sleeping—all day? Cmon, you had to at least take a leak and put something into that belly. . . Mrs. Ed or Yee didn't stick their nose in? You didn't see nobody? . . . Well (looking around), one thing, you sure weren't neating up the place.

(Pale. Ol ghostboy and Silent Cal.) (Natural—its plenty raw yet.)

I been sleepin too—on my feet AND gettin paid for it. That's talent.
(No smile) I wasn't bawlin you out, we can get squared away tonight or tomorrow
. . . Sure you have to come to eat. It'll only be them that stays here. We all get
along. You don't bother them, they don't bother you.

■

They are taking away the boxes and bundles, his low little walls.

That one on top: left over groceries. Into the kitchen, Yee. Forget takin
it off the weeks board, Mrs. Ed, they didn't cost me nothin. Bedding stuff, Bo: up
to the attic. Pots and kitchen things, Hi. Attic. . . Well who'd I leave them for
and I thought they might be worth a dime or two. Listen, you'd be surprised how
many's been in tryin to sell Evans their pots and blankets and everywhich things.
Even guns and fishin gear, and thats get-by when nobodys workin. *(Lowered
voice)* Just her clothes, Mrs. Ed, you know anybody? Mrs. Ed's room. Lamps and
little rugs, Stevie *said* they was theirs. Sure lay it down, save me a splinter. Looks
good. . . Anyone for a lamp? *(Funny noises in the kid's throat.)* Gear. *He'll* put
'em away, Mrs. Ed. The bottom drawer, kid, yours and room to spare. Just a mitt?
no ball, no bat? . . . Oddsies, endsies. Yah, a radio. Even works: Kingfish and
Madam Queen, here we is. Stevie, Mrs. Edler is talking at you: you got clean stuff
for school or does Yee have to wash? No, we never talked is he goin to school or
what. . . I'll tell you this, though, he's not goin through what me and Sis did:
kicked round one place after another, not havin nobody. Nobody. Right, Stevie?
Can you use a clock, High? Attic. . . Was you startin to say something, Stevie?
(Ghostboy! Swallowing, snuffling.) Naw, that last box stays: our ketchall; it'll take
time, goin through it.

Wait, Bo, maybe I'll chase along after all IF you got the doremi.
Sattiday night, isn't it? and I feel the week. *(What am I doing, what am I goin
to do with this miserable kid?)* Stevie's for the shuteye anyway, aren't you, kid.

Are you for the shuteye, Stevie?

Scratch of a twig on the window. All he has to lull to, who has rocked
his nights high on a tree of noise, his traffic city.

Blind thick dark, whose sleep came gentled in streetlamp glow.

And the head on his pillow bulging, though still he is having to hold it
up somewhere And the round and round slipping sliding jolting mov^{ed} to
inside him, so he has to begin to rock his body; rock the cot gently, down and
back.

Down and back. It makes a throb for the dark. A clock sound.

That man Highpockets who stuck his hand out at supper and said
"Shake, meet the wife" and everybody laughed, he had their clock that stood by
the bamboo lamp. A tiny lady in a long dress leaned on it and laughed and held
up a tinier flower branch. It had been one of his jobs to wind it and it wheezed
while he was winding.

Jobs.

He couldnt remember, was it Bo had taken the lamp? Telling everybody

at the table like it was a joke or important Would you believe it? He's never been fishin never been huntin never held a gun never been in a boat.

Never Forever

Down and back. The army blanket itched. When he was a kid he'd really believed that story about they were that color and scratchy because of blood and mud and poo and powdered licy things from the war that never could get washed out

Down and back A clock sound It keeps away

What had happened with the bloody quilt? Soft quilt She hadn't even asked how he was when they let him in after all that waiting and waiting to see her Just: did you . . .soak . . .my quilt Burning eyes

Gentle eyes that looked long at him blood dripping from where should be eyes out in the hall swathed bodies floating like in bad movies never touching the ground At the window

down and back down and back

If he had the lamp the boxes

You promised and see I'm someplace else again dark and things that can get me and I don't know where anything is. Don't expect *me* to be 'sponsible

down and back

they should have put the clock and lamp in with her the boxes and bundles and wall and put them round her everything would be together he wouldn't have to try and remember or hold up his head that wouldn't lay down inside the one on the pillow and let him sleep

down and back down and back

■

All that week he would be lying on the cot in the half dark when Wes got home from work; jump up to re-close the door; lie down again until Wes made him wash up, go in to supper.

At the table he looked at no one, answered in monosyllables, or seemed not to hear at all, stared at the wall or at his wrist, messed the food on his plate into the form of one letter or another, hardly ate

Supper over, he would walk somnambule back to the gaunt room, take off his shoes, get under the covers and lie there, one hand over his eyes.

Bo, Hi, crowded in chattering alongside the radio or playing a quick round of cards; Wes oiling his boots for work, tinkering with fishing-hunting gear, playing the harmonica; or the room empty: lying there, his arm over his eyes snuffling scratching swallowing

One Monday (let him be a while, Mrs. Ed had said), Wes, on his way to work, left the boy at the Klamath crossroads to wait the school bus.

He stands motionless in the moist fog that is almost rain, in Bo's too big fishing slicker. Blurs of shapes loom up and pass. Once a bindle stiff plods by. The across-the-road is blotted out.

When the bus stopped and the door snorted open, he still does not move. The driver tried three honks, poked his head out and yelled: c'mon New, whatever your name, I'm late. You can do your snoozing inside.

Laughter from in the bus. In hoots.

Slowly, as if returning from an infinite distance, the boy focusses his eyes on the driver, shaking his head and moving his lips as if speaking. He was still mutely shaking "No", as the faces at the grimy windows began to slip by fast and faster, contorted or vacant or staring.

On *his* face, lifted to the fog, is duplicated one by one, the expressions on the faces of his fellow young. Still he stood, his lips moving. When he had counted thirteen cars passing (a long while), he crossed and went back down the road, the way his uncle had brought him.

■

Days.

This time when Wes got home, his neatly made bed was torn up, its blanket bunched round the boy stretched out in dimness near the window.

At the expected convulsive jumpup, Wes stepped back and grabbed the doorknob himself. Alright, alright, I'm closin it. The law aint chasin *me*. Are they chasin you?

(but the boy had not moved at all)

He felt like yelling: why do you do that or: look at me, for once say hello.

Instead he sat down heavily in the big chair, unlaced his boots. No, I won't ask what he's been doin. Nothin. He'll say it in nothin, too.

Night scratched at the window and seeped from the room corners. No other sound but rising river wind.

The work of the day (of the week, of years) slumped onto Wes. For a minute he let go, slept: snored, great sobbing snores. In a spasm of effort, jerked awake, regarded the shadows, the rumple on the floor by the window.

Something about the light, the radio, not being snapped on, the absence of the usual attempted pleasantries, some rhythm not right, roused the boy from the trancing secret tremble of leaves against the low glowing sky. Was that his mother or his uncle sagged there in the weight of weariness, and why were her feet on the floor?

Get back he said implacably Your footstools gone too In a box or thrown away or somebody else resting their tootsies on it Serve you right How you going to put up your feet and rub on the varicose like you like to, now?

(Blue swollen veining) (Are you tired, Ma? Tired to death, love.)

What are you twitchin your muscles like a flybit horse for? asked Wes. And stop swallowin snot.

He slept again This man he hardly knew who came and took everything and him and put him in another place he did not know where he was. Slumped, sagged, like. . .

Wes, if you set your feet up on something. WES

If I what?

If you set your feet up on a box

A box. For Crizake

Or a chair and rub where your feet hurt

A box. Say, did you do up that box today like I told you?

It rests them, Wes. You rub up, not down

Answer me. Did you? No. You leave the only thing I ask you to do, for me to do, on my day off My one day Just look at this place You didn't help High neither when I asked you You think the candlefish run is goin to last forever? Maybe you might of brung in a basket or two Mrs. Ed would've took it into consideration You cost boy ghostboy don't you know that? My Saturday night for one thing my one night to howl you're costin

(Shrimp!) (I'd better watch it; I'm really spoiling tonight.) A

rancorous: What's goin to be with you, you dummy kid? raps out anyway.

Sounding a long plaintive mockcowboy howl, switching on the light, yanking him up (God, he's skinny) and with a shove that is half embrace, steers the kid in to dinner.

Where he'd pushed the boiled salt salmon and potatoes away, the crack on his plate said: *Y. You cost, boy, you cost.* In his wrist a little living ball pushed, as if trying to get out Where the visiting nurse put her pinky and counted too sick people

Sagged with weariness like Wes, her stockings rolled down rubbing rubbing where the blue veins swoll

On the wall the bottom of the Indian bow made: *U. No, a funny V. Y. V. Vaud-e-ville.* He'd stay for it twice and the feature twice and maybe the serial too while the light the silvery light Face bigger and bigger on the screen Closer Vast glutinous face Sour breath *IS YOU DERE, CHARLIE?*

Bo. Only Bo. Everybody at the table laughing

And now the faces start up bigger than the room on the fast track Having to hold up Hurry

At the door, Wes heard it again, that faint rhythmic creak. The first time, nights ago, he had thought: is the little bastard jacking off? but it wasn't that kind of a sound. Switching the light on, he saw the boy—as usual—lying on the cot, arm over his face—yes, and rolled into *his* blanket. The sound had stopped.

Sit up. Don't you know enough to excuse yourself when you leave a table sudden? Mrs. Edler was askin me, could you go upriver with her tomorrow to the deer or jumpdance or some such Indian thing they're having up at Terwer. She must want white company bad.

Is you dere, Charlie? You jumped a mile when Bo yelled that into your mug. Serves you right, sitting there night after night like you're no place at all, hardly answerin if people talk to you. Why are you such a snot? *Why* (shouting:) *IS YOU DERE?*

(Somewhere.

But the stupor, the lostness, the torpor) (the

safety)
Keep away you rememberings slippings
slidings having to hold up my head
Keep away you trying to get me's.
Become the line on a plate, on a wall
The rocking and the making warm,
Movement of leaves against sky
I work so hard for this safety
Let me a while Let me)

C'mon. Set up like you belong. We're going to get shed of that box.
Right now. But first you make up my bed. Just *keep* that blanket you dragged
round the floor, and give me yours.

C'mon, tuck those corners in. We keep things neat around here. Monday
you're starting school. For sure this time. No more of this laying round.

Neat, I said. Now, where's that goddamn box. And quit making those
damn noises.

Scooping onto the bed: boy-sitting-on-a-chamber-pot ash
tray Happy Joss Hollywood California painted fringed
pillow cover kewpie doll green glass vase, cracked
Jesus, what junk

tiny India brass slipper ash tray enamel cigarette case,
Fujiyama scene (thrown too close to the edge of the bed, it
slithers off, slips down behind) pencils, rubber banded

Junk is right. We sure threw it in in a hurry
coiled brass snake Plush candy box: sewing stuff: patches,
buttons in jars, stork scissors, pincushion doll, taffeta
bell skirt glistening with glass pinheads

Now you got a dolly to play with Ketch Can't you even ketch?
Red plush valentine box: nestled in the compartments:
brown baby hair, ribbon tied perfume bottle empty
china deer miniature, the fawn headless heart locket, stone
missing sand dollar, gull feather

close quick

Now why did we. . .

tarnished mesh purse: in it a bright penny lipstick
rouge-powder compact, slivered mirror powder sifts

close quick

Pictures: palm size, heart shaped frame
onto the bureau
celluloid frame, tin laddered back stand

onto the bureau
stained oblong cardboard, smaller snapshots clipped round
the large center one (His hand falters, steadies)

onto the bureau

More boxes, slender, rubber banded: in the first,
letters tied in a man's handkerchief, tin collar

button, red garter band, ribboned medal pinned to
a yellow envelope
In the second (vicious the rubber band snaps)
D O N ' T

The boy rigid on the floor, eyes glazed, mouth open, fixed, face contorted.
A fit?

Steve? Stevie?

Crawling now, a snake. Rising. With the pillow batting the box out of
Wes's hands, flailing at him. *Put it back.* With the pillow shoving everything off
the bed into the box. *Put it back. If you was dead you'd put it back all* With
the pillow pushing the box into the hall slamming the door *all of it dead*
bury buried Runs to the chamberpot vomits jabs at Wes when he tries to
help him runs to the door to run out sees the box runs back takes the coverlet
to him and rocks

Alright alright Easy Some other day where was my marbles?
Phew Just a bad day, Stevie mine was a Lulu Alright, it's over It was too
soon, I know All her things and she's not. . Alright Easy

Heaving again.

You through? I'll get it out of here. (Almost falling over the box on his
way to empty the slop.) (No, nobody home I can bum a drink off of. Sattiday
night. . .) (*What am I doing what am I going to do with this miserable kid?*)

Bawling now like a girl.

Alright! It's over, Stevie It got me too Easy You got to grab hold
. . . It's no good for you, all this layin round never goin out like normal Monday
you'll start School Keep you busy You'll be with other kids, play ball, have
somebody to fish with Not lay around all the time thinkin about her, feelin bad.

Stopping his rocking. I don't. I don't.

Easy. It's all right; it's natural. But now you got to take hold.

Shut up bastard. Jabbing at his uncle. Shut up. I told you I don't think
about her, I don't feel bad. She's dead. Don't you know she's dead, don't you know?

Fending him off nodding wordlessly (*don't I know?*) Edging him
back to the cot Easy Do I have to paste you one? Forget it, try to sleep, fella
There's just so much I can stand Easy I'm so tired I could drop I'll help you
to catch hold, Steve, I promise I'll help Stop now Try to sleep Holding him
down to the cot I'm tryin. Doing the best I can, even if it turns out worse like
usual But tryin. You try too. You hear that, Stevie? You try too.

Having to hold up

The pictures stayed, untouched, face down on the dresser. Wherever
the box went, Wes assumed it was to the attic. Days later, making his bed, he
found the cigarette case, slipped it into a drawer against that far time he might
no longer have to roll his own, could afford tailor-mades.

The boy would not rouse. Shaken awake, would not come to breakfast,
refused to go out with him and Bo. "We was goin to start you practice shootin

today, try for some fish, maybe even let you take the wheel a while. *You're* the loser." But he did not do much urging, wanting to get away from the incomprehensible moil of with-that-boy.

Before he went, he left instructions: Don't lay down *once*, not once. Neat up this room. If there's going to be any hot water, get yourself scrubbed up for school tomorrow Squeak clean. Find out has Yee got some work you can do; God, what in hell CAN you do. Get outside even if its raining down to the river throw rocks or something. Keep yourself moving Hear? And don't try to con me.

Asleep in the big chair when Wes got back; no, not asleep (hair still wet and an almost phosphorescent shine on his face) (*ghostboy*) so *gone*, Wes's breath stopped for a moment. Maybe I ought to get a doc, or ask Mrs. Ed to look in the doctor book. But what would she look for? laying around? throwin up? actin nuts?

Then the dazed, shocked eyes looked at him but the voice said, perfectly normal: I did everything like you told. Yee cooked him and me rice chow yuk so I don't have to go in for supper tonight, do I. How was your fishing, Wes?

He did not go to school.

Clean to his one white shirt with its streaks of blueing, clutching his and Wes's lunch pails, he sat silent in the pickup till Wes slowed for the crossroads stop where, three weeks before, he had been left for the school bus. Quickly he is over the side.

Hey, *I'm* takin you. You forget? WAIT! Where do you think you're heading?

Plodding back towards Requa.

Get back here. Listen, don't pull no girl tantrum. Get in.

Having to pull over to the shoulder, park, run after him. His violent grab missing, so that he tears the sleazy jacket, half yanking down the boy.

I'm not going, Wes.

Get up, you're going all right. If I have to drag you.

I'd leave soon as you were gone, Wes.

Starting down the road again.

Spinning him around, socking him a good one, steering him back into the car. (*What am I doing, what am I going to do*)

What you got against school anyway?

You're headed straight for the nuthouse, layin round like you've been doing. Just nuttier every day. I'm not goin to let you.

I'll have the truant officer, see? Wait, is 14 or 16 the limit?

You're goin, see. What the hell else you got to do? C'mon, dust yourself off. I can't be late.

Starting to climb out again.

Really hurting him; pinning him back, banging and banging his head against the wheel, against the seat. You *have* to go, see?

Wes (in a strangled voice) Wes you're hurting If I find me a job?

A job! Releasing him in disgust. You ARE in a nutworld. Half the grown men in the county's not working, High's down to two days, and this dummy kid talks about a job.

In Frisco then, Wes? Maybe set up pins again. Or ship?

In Frisco, my God. It's worse there, you know that. And how you goin to make that 500 miles? And who you got in your corner there? Nobody. You NEED learnin.

Starting up the motor.

Wes, I'll jump.

socking him again. Hard.

Wes, if I go with you? Ask Mr. Evans, can I help? A learn job, Wes.

By you.

Something in the boys voice. . . This time Wes's hands on his shoulders are gentle. Steve, don't fight it no more. It's five, maybe six weeks to vacation. . . fishin You'll have school buddies. Maybe you're even goin to like school. And even if you don't, sometimes in this life you got to do what you *don't* like.

(*Sometimes!*) Evans ain't about to put anybody on—if he did, Ez would be first choose; every week Ez is in askin: can he have his job back. . . Evans don't have it, Stevie. Sometimes its slow even for me. And everythings credit or trade-in; when we get a nickel, he bites it, makes sure its real. I'm surprised he pays *me*.

Ask him, Wes. You said: I'll help you, Steve. You said it. He don't have to pay me. You hurt me, Wes. A learn job. By you. You promised.

Not school

Never

Forever

■

Gas Butane Sportsmens Goods
Auto Parts Fittings Tools
Lumber Rags Scrap Iron
Electric/plumbers/builder supply
Housefurnish things

Auto Repair Towing Wrecking
Machining Soddering Welding
Tool & Saw Sharping Glasswork
Boat caulking/repair

(Leaky, appraising eyes) Sure, why not? Favor to you, Wes. Anything he gets done, we're that much ahead. But if he's in the way, or it don't work out, that's it. And he's *your* headache. Anybody sticks their nose in, he's helping you, not working for me. Don't get him expecting anything for the piggy bank, either. Used stock sometime maybe, whatever I think it's worth and he's worth. Catch?

NEW USED
U NAME IT - WE GOT IT
U ASK IT - WE FIX IT

Tumble of buildings and sheds, stockpiles and junk—a block from the bridge—sprawled in the crotch between 101 going north/south and the short crooked upriver road to game and Indian country.

Landscape of thinghillocks and mounds innumerable. Which shed is which? The wind blows so. Too close: scaly, rapid river; too close: dwarfing, encircling: dark massive forest rise.

Stumbling the mounds in his too thin jacket or Bo's too big slicker after Wes. (*got to figure out what's simple enough he can do. Keep him up. Moving. Paying attention.*) Helping haul drag break apart; find the right sized used tire, generator, lumbersash; hand the measure the part the tool

Cold hardly comprehending wearing out so quick

I said the red devil Red devil glass cutter Your ears need reaming?

Does that even *look* like a 16 x 120? Even the thing they throw peanuts at could figger it

What you breathin like that for? You must have *one* ittybitty muscle to match your brain. I showed you: if you lift it this way, she goes easy. Easy. A right way and a wrong way—easy is the right way.

Maybe this is better'n school for you now, Stevie Keep you outdoors, build you up I got so much to learn you All your life you can use it.

Into the tool shed when it rains: *Keep busy* Sort outa the bins into these here washboilers: like, pipe fittins: brass here copper there: elbows flanges unions couplings bends tees. Check out the drawers, see just what belongs is in 'em; get acquainted: like this row: wing nuts castellated slotted quarter inch *Pay attention!*

The mess heap. Your baby to red up when I'm not needin you. Stack everything, that's what's here, everything—with its own kind. If theys a pile or shed already for it, get it over there Whats too far gone or cant be burnt, leave. Get them rotten carpets mattresses out first. Then them batteries Pile 'em so. . . .where I expect to spot you when you're not workin with me, see?

Heaps piles glut accumulation

Sores cuts blisters on his hands

Don't look: scaly rapid river

dark forest encircling

blowing rain blowing fog sunless cold

Can't you tell the difference between taper and spiral fluted? (lock or finish washer?) (adapter, extension?) can't you? can't you?

Who said you could come in here and lay down? You sure tire instant. Get yourself back to the burn pile and throw that filthy ragquilt out of here. No wonder you're always scratching.

Is that a shimmy or a shiver? I ought to take me a razor cut, see

is it blood or icewater runs in your carcass
Didn't you hear me callin? Answer me. What you staring at? You
paralyzed? (*ghostboy*) Drop that carpet and get out of sight till
you can come to Do I have to paste you one?

(The stiff mouldy rug breaks like cardboard in his hands
Underneath maggot patterns writhe)

Is that all you got done and I let you alone all mornin for it? What's
there goin to be to show Evans you're of use Yah, useful as the
tit on a bull O for Crizake, you're not here at all

More and more wrapped in the peacock quilt, rocking, scratching,
snuffling. Rain on the tool shed roof; the little kerosene stove hissing warmth
through its pierced crown. Wes looming in the doorway, the grey face of
evening behind him. C'mon, useless. 6:30. You killed another day. I *knowed* this
was never going to work.

And once, in the most mournful of voices: Can't you do no better? I
can't stand it, Stevie. You're ending up in the dummy or loony house, for sure.

But the known is reaching to him, stealthily, secretly, reclaiming.

Sharp wind breath, fresh from the sea. Skies that are all seasons in one
day. Fog rain. *Known weather of his former life.*

Disorder twining with order. The discarded, the broken, the torn from
the whole: weathereaten weatherbeaten: mouldering, or waiting for use-need.
Broken existences that yet continue.

Hasps switches screws plugs faucets drills
Valves pistons shears planes punchers sheaves
Clamps sprockets coils bits braces dies

How many shapes and sizes; how various, how cunning in application.
Human mastery, human skill. Hard, defined, enduring, they pass through his
hands—link to his city life of man made marvel.

Wes: junking a towed-in car, one hundred pieces out of what had been
one. Singing - unconscious, forceful - to match the motor hum as he machines
a new edge, rethreads a pipe. Capable, fumbling; exasperated, patient; demand-
ing, easy; uncomprehending, quick; harsh, gentle: *concerned* with him. *The
recognizable human bond.*

The habitable known, stealthily, secretly, reclaiming.

The dead things, pulling him into attention, consciousness.

The tasks: coaxing him with trustworthiness, pliancy, doing as he bids

having to hold up

Rifts:

Wes sets the pitch, the feed, the slide rest to chase a thread. "Wes, *let
me.* We're learning it in shop. It's my turn again Monday."

(Monday! What Monday? A Monday cobweb weeks miles gone life
ago) Hard, reassuring, the lathe burrs; spins under his hands. (Somewhere in

cobweb mist, a school - speck size Somewhere smaller specks that move speak
have faces)

Watch it! O my God, you dummy. How'm I goin to explain *this* one to
Evans.

Painted wheat wreathes on a tin breadbox he is tipping to empty of
rain Remembered pattern; forgotten hunger spicing Peanut butter, sour
french bread Ringed hand rising through his face reflected in the rusty agitated
water

He lifts the wrecking mallet, pounds. Long after the spurting water has
dried from his face and the tin is shreds in great muddy earth gouges, he still
mindlessly pounds.

Later, dragging a mattress to the burn pile, his face contorts, fixes rigid,
mouth open. The rest of the day in the tool shed, to lie immobile, and will not
get up even to Wes's kick of rage.

Rags stiff and damp Green slime braids with the rope coils, white
grubs track his palm

Bottle fly colors lustre the rotting harness rusty tongueless bells fall

He is warmer now. An old melton coat with anchor buttons that Evans
let Wes take from the clothes shed. Faint salt of a seaman's many voyagings seem
to nest in it, and deep in the pockets, mysterious graininesses crumble. Afternoons,
if the strong northwest winds of May clear the sky an hour or two, the coat distils,
stores the sun about him as he moves through mound-sheltered warmth in and
out of the blowing cold; or sits with Wes, poncho over the muddy ground, eating
their baloney and bread lunch in the sun-hive the back of the scapiron pile makes.

Weeds, the yellow wild mustard and rank cow parsnip, are already waist
high, blow between him and the river. Blue jays shrill, swoop for crumbs; chip-
munks hover. Wes gabs, plays his harmonica. The boy lies face down in his pool
of warmth. In him something keeps trembling out in the wind with the torn
whirled papers, the bending weeds, the high tossed gulls.

Only the rain saves him—otherwise, before lunch, he practices shooting.
Buckets, cans, are spotted in a semicircle for targets, the rococo scroll of a
carpet beater nailed to a post. Sight. Squeeze. Anticipatory wince. Shuddering
rock of the recoil.

Who barks more, Wes or the gun? If you'd been concentrating if you'd
just been concentrating. I want you good as me, Stevie. See? 200 yards right on
target everytime.

The bruise on his shoulder - from when? Wes's beating the day he
would not go to school? - purples, spreads.

Helping at the gas pump, he keeps his head lowered so that he knows
the grease spots on the ground and how they change from day to day, but not
who is in the cars. Even when the speech comes glottal, incomprehensible, Indian,

he will not look up on the faces, nor on those of the riggers and swampers, checking the chains tight around the two-three giant logs that make up their load.

Grease spots, and how they change from day to day; loggers muddied boots, flowerets and pine needles embedded; pliant redwood hair strands loosened from the logs and blowing across the road; the cars of the regulars; Evans dry ghost cough from the store, and that a certain worn-to-bareness tire tread brings him watchfully into hearing distance: these he comes to know – but never faces.

Once, checking tires (young swaggering voices in the car), a girl steps out on the running board, so close he can smell her, round his hand to her bared thigh, the curve of her butt.

Relentless, vehement: clamor congests engorges. Gas bite, the soaked rag held to his nostrils, will not help.

Wes, don't call me to the pumps any more.

You'll do as you're told, you snotty kid Snotty's right Everytime I look at you. Wipe that nose. You need a washer in there?

relentless

engorged

clamorous

stealthily secretly reclaiming

Terrible pumps:

Evans out more and more.

Davis does what *I* say, see? Pay on the line or no tow. Yep, no dough, no go. I don't care *how* many kids you got stuck in your jalopy, or how far you had to hitch to get here. Sure we got a used transmission. We got a used everything. But for do-re-mi. Don't ask *me* how you're going to manage without a heap. . . You can junk it.

No, not even for five gallons trade, I won't take that mattress. I got a shed full now. There's maybe four hundred families the fifty miles around; they're sleeping on something already; who's going to buy 'em off me? No. That spare hasn't got a thousand miles left. Well maybe the gun.

Ten gallons gets you up - say - Grants Pass. How do *I* know how you'll make it to your brothers in Chehalis. One thing we *don't* sell here is a crystal ball.

Whisper: Over here, Wes. I don't want ol Skinflint to spot me. You think you might have some link chain like this? An/8th or maybe a/4th. I got this idea, see? Sports season coming, and you know how they like to bring back a souvenir. Well, Christmas we didn't know what to do, so I whittled the boys up little lumber trucks - load of logs, chain and all - they're still playing with 'em. I thought till the woods open up again, I might pick up some loose change makin 'em to sell. Esty's doing up dolls out of redwood hair. Real cute. Evans won't help me out, but you will, won't you Wes. I'm about out of my mind.

When I call you I don't mean tomorrow sometime next week. If I catch you cuddlin up to that stove again, I'll turn you every which way but loose

■

The smell or the whiskey is making him sick is making him happy is making him sleepy The brights and the ragtime making him happy Lights lights little lights over the fireplace going on and off and on and off and on and off and on if you wink your eyes in time in time I love you lights Are you howling Wes is that how you howl your night to howl? O Wes in the blue of smoke and breaths tapdancing with Bo and that lady Esty in the middle and that fatso man Stop you don't know how to tap, Wes The keys on the player piano nickel in the slot piano know how jigging and tapping and nobodys playing them because I'M playing them long distance knowing how tapping and dancing (luxurious round the table round the dollars his fingers tapping) round and round

What you going to do with those two big beautiful cartwheels honey? Tapdance my fingers round and round them what he didn't answer her and should have because because and here the breathblue smokeblue clouded into his head and on and off and round tiniest sparkle on the wall calendar snow scene, moose locking horns sparkly I love you O I like that ragtime kitten on the keys I *am* the keys What did you say that's so ha ha Wes? wave wave dance my hand (no nobody's looking) highstep o highstep and off and on and round I wanta go to a movie show and round Red light that squiggles to you in the fog and when you get closer says E A T but nobody's eating they're dancing they think its dancing chewing the rag and swiggling and off and on and sparkle and round and fire jumping and Wes howling

Stop that, Bo

sticky and cold, the whiskey doused over him. Again. *Best hair tonic there is, I'm tellin you, kid, use it myself every celebratin night and it stinks so purty*

It doesn't it doesn't and it doesn't wipe off and the smell is on his sleeve now so when he has to wipe his nose or wave his arm is making him sick and off and on and round o put another nickel in reeling waltz I wanta go to a picture show a man crying (Fatso) *sobby sentimental stew* O ma, that's funny, a sobby sentimental stew

Liar You promised and see I'm another place again no movies and no stores and no Chinatown and cold water in the faucet you have to pump not even lights just tonight little prickle kind and one squiggle sign just tonight and round and round and off and on push on the keys dance tap float on the sadness sleep pushing down clouding with the air and Sure I'm listening Wes No thanks you just gave me another nip Yah *how you keep Evans from catching on that I'm not all there* Yah and round sparks like blows

from a fist the fire? over the fireplace, branching antlers, sad deer eyes in
the fire, branching antlers glowing eyes am going to be sick

aaagh
aaagh

■

A dream? The yard lithe Bo tapdancing the mounds Wes in the furnish shed
handing out bottles gurgling from one himself bootleg he don't know I know
he's peddlin hooch but I do, gettin in on it just when it's goin to get legal end
hard times Turning round and round a musical saw wheel dry whispery papery
sad sound *they have taken her to Georgia* Wes's harmonica prowl papery
sad *there to wear her life away* making his saddest trainwhistle sounds
round and round

■

The damp rushing air slaps slaps the boys face: *wake up* the lurching in his belly,
the pitching truck: *wake up*. Wes slapping too, jabbing him away with his
elbow every lurch he is thrown against him; waves of drunk smell from Wes's breath
or is it his own sleeve: *wake up*. Wes driving jolty, not like Wes at all: shouting
singing mumbling beating on the dash. Crooning: poor ol shrimp cant sit up
poor ol shrimp passin out Take him out to celebrate Evans shakin loose two
smackers and he cant take it cant celebrate FOODerackysacky want some seafood
momma shrimpers and rice are very nice poor ol shrimp (pounding on the
dash) YOU'RE A SHIT EVANS YOU HEAR ME (whispering) he don't know
though does he (elbow jab) he don't know you're not all there (loud) cause I
cover up good don't I Stevie? We'll have a heaver on that, hey? Me, not you,
shrimp. Am taking care of you like I promised. Right?

Vamp me honey kitchaleecoo anything you'll want we'll do Jab.

Forever long to get to Mrs. Eds. Not the same way they came. Jolt, jolt. Is it even
a road? Headless shadows in the carlights. Stumps. *Not all there* Sparks like
blows Hurtled, falling falling Wet on his face fir needles leaves. Blood?

C'mon, up, up, see if you're hurt. Well I did stop sudden. You're fine,
kid, sound as a dollar. Go ahead, puke. I got to go to this place down here, see?

Thick oblivious laughing mumbling pawing the floor of the truck
for something, throwing the poncho at him, hard. *Cover up* Dont want you
ketching cold. You're running out of snot as is. Counting, recounting his silver by
the light of a flash. Expansively: Keep 'em, Stevie, keep 'em; don't need 'em.

Need what? Thick black His trembling body redoing the hurtling fall
over and over all scraped places burning. His shoulder. . . Far down in trees
a weak light whorled, spectral, veined Eyes

Wes, wait, wait for me. Tripping over the poncho. On the ground again,
his nose bubbling blood.

Easier to just lie there roll into the poncho shrink into the coat cry
(In one soft pocket his fingers tap round and round the silver dollars; in the other,
hold the tongueless bell.) Put another nickel Some celebrating! *Not all there*

Faint salt smell from drying blood? the coat? Warm. Round and round not even minding the dark

Sudden the knowledge where Wes has gone. *Annie Marines*, she sells it. Nausea. Swelling, swollen aching. Relentless. Helpless, his hand starts to undo the coat layer (*meet the wife, meet the wife*).

Slap. On his face. Another slap. Great drops. *Rain*. Move, you dummy. Pushing himself up against a tree, giant umbrella in the mottled dark. Throb sound in and around him (his own excited blood beat?) *Rain*, hushing, lapping.

City boy, he had only known rain striking hard on unyielding surface, walls, pavement; not this soft murmurous receiving: leaves, trees, earth. In wonder he lay and listened, the fir fragrance sharp through his caked nostrils. Warm. Dry.

Gently he began to rock. The hardness had gone down by itself.

Far down where Wes was, a branch shook silver into the light. *Rain*. *His mothers quick shiver as the rain traced her cheek. C'mon baby, we've got to run for it.*

Laughing. One of her laughing times. Running fast as her, the bundles bumping his legs. Running up the stairs too. Tickling him, keeping him laughing while she dried his face with the rough towel.

Twisting away from the pain: trying to become the cocoa steam, the cup ring marking the table, the red checked tablecloth. *Her shiver*. How the earth received the rain, how keen its needles. Don't ask *me* where your umbrella got put, don't expect *me* to be 'sponsible, you in your leaky house.

Her shiver. Rain underneath, swelling to a river, floating her helpless away *Her shiver*

Twisting from the pain: face contorted, mouth fallen open fixed to the look on her dying, dead face.

When Wes lurched down the path, he still did not move. The helpless pain came again. For Wes this time, drunk, stumbling, whispering: O my God, I've had better imagines, O my God.

Stevie! Where the hell are you? You scared the hell out of me. . . Get in. I feel lower than whale shit, and that's at the bottom of the ocean.

The light was still on. Wes must have carried or walked him in, been too drunk to make him wake up, undress. Wes hadn't undressed either, lay, shoes muddy on his bed, he, who was always the neat one.

The boy stared at the bulb staring at him; then, painfully, got up, pulled off his clothes, went over and knelt by Wes's bed to tug off the offending shoes and cover him.

One of Wes's fists trembled; a glisten of spit trickled out of the corner of his mouth. His fly was open. How rosy and budlike and quiet it sheathed there.

The blanket ends wouldn't lap to cover. He had to pile on his coat, Wes's mackinaw, and two towels, patting them carefully around the sleeping form. *There now you'll be warm*, he said aloud, *sleep sweet, sweet dreams* (though he did not know he had said it, nor in whose inflections.)

He was shivering with cold now. *Dummy or crazy house not all there*

Though he put his hands out imploringly to protect himself the blows struck at him again. His uncle moaned, whispered something; he leaned down to hear it, looked full on the sleeping face. Face of his mother. *His* face. Family face

For once he was glad to turn off the light and have the shutting darkness: hugged the pillow over his face for more. At the window spectral shapes tapped; out in the hall, swathed forms floated, wrung their hands. Later he hurtled the fall over and over in a maggoty sieve where eyes glowed in rushing underground waters and fire branched antlers, fir needle after shining needle.

■

accurately threaded, reamed and chamfered Shim Imperial flared
cutters benders grinders beaders
shapers notchers splicers reamers

how many shapes and sizes,
how various, how cunning in
application

What did Toots and Casper want? Did I hear them asking for two gallons of gas? *Two* gallons? Where they coming from anyway? I thought that kind were all riding 99.

Tentacle weeds pierce the dishpan he is trying to pry up. Orange rust flowerings flake, cling to the quivering stalks, embroider the gaping pan holes. Beauty of rot rust mold

Wingding anchors bearing sheaves plated, crackle, mottled blue, satin, finish

Are you dreamin or workin? That carbon should of been clean chipped off by now. I *promised* that motor. O for Crizake, you ain't here at all.

Something is different at Mrs. Eds. Is it the longer light? How clear everyone is around the table, though still he does not look into their faces. The lamps, once so bright and hung with shadows, are phantom pale now; the windows, once black mirrors where apparitions swam, show green and clear to heads of trees, river glint, dark waver of hill against sunset sky.

Highpockets is gone. When had he gone, and why? The blurredness will not lift. A new man, thready, pale, sits in his place and has his room.

The talk eddys around him: aint going to be no season, not in Alaska Vancouver or Pedro . . . like crabs feedin on a dead man, like a lot of gulls waitin for scraps . . . the Cascades the Olympics the Blues . . . nickel snatchin bastards

He sees that it is not shadows that hang on the wall around the bow, but Indian things: a feathered headdress, basket hats, shell necklace. Two faces dream in shell frames. One, for all the beard, Mrs. Ed's.

family face

sharpening hauling sorting splicing
burring chipping grinding cutting
grooving drilling caulking sawing

the tasks, coaxing

rust gardens

Nippers. You bring nippers. Did you think I was going to *bite* the wire?
Try it with *your* choppers.

Miming Wes's face Sounding Evans dry ghost cough Gentling his
bruised shoulder. Sometimes stopping whatever he is doing, his mouth opening:
fixed to the look on her dying face

The kniving wind blows the encircling forest to a roar. Papers fly up and
blind; a tire is blown from his hand. He scrambles the scrapiron pile to the shelter
side, stands, coat flapping, blown riverspray wet on his face, hallooing and
hallooing to the stone bears on the bridge.

Loony, loony, get down. You see that canvas needs tackin? Tack.

Pilings on pilings. Rockers, victrolas, flyspecked mirrors, scroll trundle
sew machines, bureaus, bedsteads, baby buggies.

Wes, I can't hardly open the door, it won't go in, there's no room.

No room, you make room, dummy. That's the job. You good for anything?

We'll be able to start burnin today or tomorrow if the wind stays down,
says Wes. Don't this sun feel good? Just smell.

Meld of rose bay, forest, river, earth dryings. The sun stirring the brew
to a great fragrant steaming. In it, every metal scrap, every piece of glass, glances,
flashes, glitters, spangles, ripples light.

Wes stands in fountains of light: white sparkles as he moves the wheel
for knife sharpening; blue jettings as he welds a radiator.

I didn't know you could sing, Stevie. You practicing for the Majors
Amateur Hour?

It's for my head, Wes.

Outa your head, you mean.

The baking warmth, the dazzle, the windlessness.

Towards noon the next day, they set the burn pile. Wes lets him douse
on the gasoline, but the boys look is so unnatural – spasms of laughing and spastic
body dance as the flames spurt – Wes cuffs him away.

You a firebug nut or something? Get away, loony.

The wordless ecstasy will not contain. Quiver and dazzle are magnified in
the strange smoking air. Baking mud sucks at his shoes as he runs from flash to

flash. Stench of burning rubber and smoldering wet rags layer in with the heady sweet spring vapors. A stately rain of ash begins. It drives him down by the river, but the stench and dazzle are there too, and flashing rainbow crescents he does not know are salmon leaping. The blue water greens the edging forest, the climbing fir trees blue the sky. On a sandy spit, sun drenched, he lays himself down.

Only when they turn at Panther Creek for the Requa cutoff do they leave the smoke. They ride west into setting sun glare. The road is gold, black leaves shake out sungold, and from the low gilded deer brush there reels a drunken wild-lilac smell.

Ten more days to huntin, Stevie. You don't know how much I want them few days . . . I shouldn't have got so mad at you; you're doin almost o.k. lately sometimes as much help as trouble. Even your shootin

Four days in a half stupor, pumping for breath.

Why do you have to go and pull something like this for? Now I'll have to work Decoration Day, be far enough ahead so he'll give me them three days off. . .

Mrs. Ed, come here, isn't there anything you can do to help this poor kid catch his breath?

He stands beside her negligently, as if he is not there at all, stooping his newly tall, awkward body into itself while she introduces him to the preacher, families, other young.

Better go in, Stephen, you shouldn't be standing here in this strong wind. Betty'll show you where to sit, won't you, Betty?

his Dad. . . never knew him . . . before he was
born . . . AEF . . . happened just a few months ago
. . . Wes Davis uncle . . . all he has

His sleeves don't pull down to cover ugly scabs peely walls *That these dead shall not have* Mrs. Edler's arm light on his hurt shoulder *He break: th the bow and snappeth the spear asunder as grass* cobwebs under the backless benches spiders? his skin crawls scratching the itch places he can reach scratching blood somebody giggling whispering

*There is a fountain filled with blood
and there may I, as vile as he*

dead fly in the hymn book sweet voice a girl or lady in back
wash all my sins away
somebody giggling whispering The sleeves don't pull down

■

At the first cemetery, he waits for her under the Requiescat in Pace gate. People came by, carrying wreaths and flowers and planting flags. If you were a dead soldier, you got a flag. The flags made crackle noises in the wind - like shooting practice - and kept getting blown down and having to be planted again.

A girl - that Betty maybe? - called his name, so he had to walk to a

tangled part where nobody else was. His foot kicked over something - a glass canning jar - rust and dried things that might once have been flowers in it. Did it belong to the marble hand pointing to the sky, Leo Jordan, 1859-1911, He is Not Dead but Sleeping, or to the kneeling stone lamb, almost hidden by the tall blowing weeds?

Carefully he bent down and stood it by the lamb. Milena Willett was carved on it, 1 yr. old Budded on earth
Blooming in Heaven

He had to
pull away the weeds and scratch out sandy dirt to read the rest:
The mother strives in patient trust
Her bleeding heart to bow
For safe in God the Good the Just
Her babys sleeping now

That part was sunk in the ground.

How warm it felt down there in the weeds where nobody could see him and the wind didn't reach. The lamb was sun warm too. He put his arm around its stone neck and rested. Red ants threaded in and out; the smell was sweet like before they set the burn pile; even the crackling flags sounded far away.

The sleep stayed in him all the way to the second cemetery. Other people were in the car, they had stopped at back dirt roads to get them. You always get out and open the car door for ladies, Stephen, Mrs. Edler had said. But they weren't ladies, they were Indians.

The sun baked in through the car window and their trouble talk floated in haze He says the law on his side legal *but it's ours* the Sheriff bones don't prove it he says the law

This cemetery he didn't get out of the car, pushed and rattled by the wind. Trees, bent all their lives that one way, clawed towards the windows. There were firing sounds here too, but maybe they were ocean booms. He thought he could see ocean, lashing beyond the trees.

■

What did you do to him, Wes asked Mrs. Edler. When I heard where you went, I expected sure he'd get back near dead, bad as in the beginning. But he's been frisky as a puppy all day. Chased me round the junk heaps. Rassled went down to the river on his own threwed skimmers sharpened a saw perfect Paid attention. Curled up and fell asleep on the way home.

That's where he is - still sleeping. Lay down second we got home and I can't get him up. Blowing out the biggest bubble of snot you ever saw. Just try and figger that loony kid.

(stealthily secretly reclaiming)