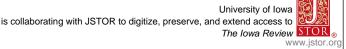
## "The Great Ones

always make it look so easy." —sitcom second banana, as a sex god whips out his lighter and a sex goddess offers her cigarette

Thunderclaps (inside of which an intercontinental flight's a toothpick in a Tarzan yell) and blasts of marrow-shivering electrical gashes muscle in from the north: a weather appropriate to The Great Ones. Maybe they'll favor us by uttering some echoing pronouncement -ethics, stocks and bonds, world war, a really great new mousse that's suddenly appeared for them as readily as manna fallen overnight. While we climb over the side of the bed each morning, little cliff edge, little lemming. While we cough gobs of lung-mess into tissues and study these viscous shapes like soothsayers. (Bloodworms. Hummingbird bowels. A drear prognostication.) When The Great Ones labor, the dross of the world is alchemically begreatened to match: Sir William Herschel, needy of a telescope mirror three feet in diameter (with no existing foundry that would risk the task), constructed himself an inexpensive mold of pounded horse dung, as if his were a vision exalted enough to lift up such rejecta into kinship with the stars. While the rest of us stumble about and wonder how our own few burlap sacks of pared-off calluses and menses-slough and hair-loss start to add up toward a life. The Great Ones: "courage" comes to mind, then even that intended adulation fails when I think of Mrs. Pankhurst on a plank bed being funnel-fed against her fervent hunger-striking wishes-four detectives bear their bull strength on the struggling suffragette to still her spasms, as a day-nurse works a tube in and another pours their pigmash down her forced throat (legal, alimentary rape is what it comes to: and her own continued, conscienceful refusal). While the rest of us aren't always strong enough to lift the phone for its single beetle of news, its single carrion beetle bearing an ash of news in its chitinous horns



between the dark and the wires. And for how many words of his Dictionary did Samuel Johnson personally write definitions ("plagued the while by ill health and the death of his wife," as one source puts it)?-43,500; while the two words "cervical" "tumor" press their pincers into the gray myrrh of my brain, and stay, and grow, and won't make room for any others. How many runaways did Sojourner Truth deliver?---while today the weight of the thought of my sister strapped down in the hospital is an anvil in my head, just her, you see how weak and small I am, just that one pea-sized leak in the hull to worry about, and I can't move-an anvil's in my head. The Great Ones: oysters rockefeller and plutonium, The Great Ones: Mount Parnassus, and my tongue is so dry. The Great Ones: silver chalices, so dry I can't, The Great Ones: papal dispensation, dry I can't begin, The Great Ones: shantung silk, I can't begin a prayer, my tongue so dry I can't begin a prayer, The Great Ones: sex in weightlessness above the Earth and civet musk and Pentateuch, I can't begin a prayer to ask for anything, The Great Ones: born absolved, The Great Ones: 60,000 television channels. ask for anything, Olympic gold, Miss Universe, The Great Ones carved of marble, ask for anything though if, The Great Ones truffles and paté, I could, though if I could, The Great Ones oratorio, The Great Ones unanimity, though if I could I'd ask for something, strong enough to lift the phone, The Great Ones: ships with sandalwood and dancing apes, to add up toward a life, The Great Ones: never grieve, or if they do the heavens weep, to ask for something, manna, stars, so modest as reprieve.