MENTAL IMAGERY AND WRITING

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Benno has just unCorked the ultimate: Fleur De Champagne by Perrier-Jouet. Before I can raise it to my lips, I find myself on another canal with Corstiaan de Vries, a charming, fun-loving designer. He is, in his own words, "absolutely not a sad person." Corstiaan's house is done in white: white walls and marble floors, white ceiling, and, of course, a touch of antique ivory. He is also done in white: white Italian shoes by Ermenegildo Aegna, white Australian wool sweater, white trousers by Tasca d'Almerita, white skin. I am surprised by a huge, exquisitely detailed, bronze insect seated on the sofa and ask him about it. "Isn't it just precious? I picked it up in Portofino last season. It is so . . . fun, in a blackish, avante-garde way." As he speaks, I am suddenly aware of the filtered light swathing Corstiaan in subtle, heart-catching luminescence. He is seated casually and, from where I am standing, seems to float behind the sofa. It is a thrilling moment. Trying to conceal the lump in my throat, I ask, "Corstiaan . . . is there anyone, anywhere – anywhere in this world – who is as exquisitely charming, as fun-loving as you?" He bends his beautifully slender, supple, white right arm. Almost imperceptibly, it glides from his casually pushed up, white sweater sleeve to his face. One carefully manicured finger ever-so-delicately, ever-so-slowly, grazes his cheek as he ponders my question.

Here, this college writer "enters another world"—specifically, the elegant sphere of *Town and Country Magazine*, where she immerses herself in the filtered light of "the privileged pleasures of Europe"—a place of "ribbon-cuttings, restorations, unveilings, benefit auctions, and charity balls." It's a superb, funny piece, which won second prize in our university-wide writing competition.

This paper was written in response to an assignment called "Entrance into Another World," which I'll soon discuss,

along with another assignment, "The Key Image-Idea." Right now, though, I want to say that this writer, in producing this piece, relied just as much upon her visual, imaginal thinking, as she did upon her verbal thinking. Maybe even more so. In teaching writing, emphasizing visual processes—in proportion to verbal ones—strengthens both.

For a tall stack of reasons—our personalities, background, training, and preferences, to name a few—writing teachers tend to define thinking and cognition as "reason" and logic. So it's natural that, when we teach, we circumvent or ignore the roles that mental imagery plays. We model and inform students about outlines, lists, freewritings, and revisions, but we seldom deal with, or even validate, our students' imaginal thought processes. Instead, we immerse ourselves and our students in seas of words. This, we see as our job.

Of course, we haven't acquired this mind-set overnight. It has grown from a long history which has placed sensory experience and perception (the basis of mental imagery) squarely apart from reason. Arnheim summarizes the history of visual thinking in Western philosophy and psychology, concluding that perception and reason have "not belonged under the same blanket" (137). Before I detail two assignments which require writers to engage in imaginal processes in proportion to their verbal processes, I will briefly review how imagery is integral to knowing and thinking, and how perception and reason do indeed reside under the same blanket.

Imagery and Knowing

> I want you to think of the following words: visual, vision, and visionary; and image, imaginary, and imagination . . . . Almost all the words we use about experiences of the kind that go into visions or images are words connected with the eye and with the sense of sight. "Imagination" is a word which derives from the making of images in the mind, from what Wordsworth called "the inward eye." But the very fact that Wordsworth could use such a phrase makes it very clear how much the intellectual activities of man are eye-conditioned. (Bronowski 10)

Not only are intellectual activities "eye-conditioned," but so are the words we use to describe them. We are knowledgeable when we possess "insight" and "foresight" (though most of us usually languish in "hindsight"). Often accompanied by a knowing nod of the head, the common response "I see" directly connects vision with understanding, just as the more colloquial "I just don't see it!" communicates an utter lack of comprehension. And finally, most human response to any situation depends upon one's "point of view."

The literature of various disciplines contains accounts of successful individuals who have exploited imaginal forms of knowing, ranging from Galton's 1874 study of English scientists and Royal engineers, to Albert Einstein's account of how "combinatory play" with images constituted the "essential feature" of his productive thought (Rico and Claggett). O'Neil describes inventor Nikola Tesla as capable of visualizing a machine in complete detail, which he could then set in motion and reexamine days later for wear and tear on its parts. Blake discusses imagery's relationships to writers such as Didion, Bradbury, and others. Carlton, who studied a professional writer's imagistic and verbal thinking over a two-year period, concludes that " . . . nonverbal thinking has a significant influence on linguistic thought" (199).

From these and other accounts, a few trends regarding mental imagery, thinking, and writing emerge. First, quite unlike the writers in our classes, people who exploit imaginal thought forms do so with complete confidence: They expect to work with lots of images, and, maybe more important, they see this activity as natural. Also, in many reports, one image may suggest additional ones; images, like words, are generative. Second, people who are "high imagers" freely, even playfully, combine, transform, and manipulate images. Finally, such people switch back and forth between verbal or visual modes of thinking.

Imagery and Thinking

Several recent theories of imagery contend that we think by virtue of a kind of balance, or interdependence, between

verbal and visual functions, or, simply stated, between language and pictures. Two theories which have gained considerable attention, including empirical support, are Paivio's "Dual Coding" theory and Kosslyn's "Array" theory. According to Paivio, this balance between verbal and visual functions is represented by "logogens" (which exist on the particulate level, such as a morpheme, syllable, or word, arranged sequentially) and "imagens" (pictorial representations); in Kosslyn's theory, by propositional and imagistic processes.

Paivio's "associational" theory posits that words may arouse other words—or images; and that images may arouse other images—or words. Begg explains it this way: "Any verbal activity in response to things must be imaginally mediated," and, in opposite fashion, "any nonverbal activity in response to linguistic events must be verbally mediated" (293). Kosslyn argues for an "arraylike medium" in our short term memory, which functions like an actual space, where images are depicted. Long term memory, on the other hand, stores quantitative or propositional information, which is used to adjust and manipulate images. In so doing, imagery processes are engaged in a constant dialogue with propositional or language processes.

Hence, in their conceptions of how we think, both Paivio and Kosslyn give approximately equal emphasis to verbal and visual processes. Kaufman, in fact, is adamant that imagery and language are the *only* meaningful operations in thinking, while Begg concludes that "imagery and language are intimately and interdependently related at many levels of analysis, whether we focus on structure or function, competence or performance, or semantic or episodic memory" (291).

Arnheim goes even further than Paivio or Kosslyn: He sees visual thinking as our primary mode of thought. For example, one commonly accepted notion is that more advanced thinkers abandon visual imagery in favor of verbal reasoning. But Arnheim disagrees. To illustrate his argument, Arnheim recounts a Piagetian demonstration of abstract reasoning known as the "conservation" experiments. Here, a child is shown two identical containers, each filled with the same amount of water. The liquid in one of them is emptied into a third vessel, which is taller and thinner than the first two.

When asked to choose the container which holds more liquid, young children will select the taller, thinner container, even though they watched the pouring. An older child will know that the amount has not changed. Advocates of verbal reasoning maintain that the older child is no longer misled by the containers' different shapes, which fooled the young child into thinking the containers held different quantities. These advocates maintain that the more sophisticated thinker has escaped from the "illusion" of perception and reached the safer ground of pure reason. Hence, Bruner states that, "It is plain that if a child is to succeed in the conservation task, he must have some internalized verbal formula that shields him from the overpowering appearance of the visual displays."

Arnheim, however, offers an alternative explanation of this experiment's results:

> The other approach maintains that to judge the two columns of liquid by, say, their height is a legitimate first step toward solving the problem. To go beyond it, the child does not leave the domain of visual imagery—there is in fact nowhere else to go—but proceeds to view the given situation in a more sophisticated fashion. Instead of considering just one spatial dimension, he looks at the interplay between two, namely height and breadth. This is true progress on the scale of mental development, achieved not by going "beyond the information given" in perception but, on the contrary, by going more deeply into it.
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> The fact that thinking of this kind must take place in the perceptual realm because there is no place else to go is obscured by the belief that reasoning can only be done through language . . . although language is a valuable aid to much human thinking, it is neither indispensable nor the medium in which thinking takes place . . . . Productive thinking operates by means of the things to which language refers—referents that in themselves are not verbal, but perceptual. (137–8)

Imagery in the Classroom

If we don't acknowledge the presence and value of imaginal thought processes, then our students, too, will divorce it from writing processes and products, even though they may employ visual thinking in their everyday lives—whether they are daydreaming, watching a film, or trying to determine whether they will have enough space in their living room if they move the couch to an opposite wall. At worst, novice writers may regard visual thinking as irrelevant or taboo, considering pictures and words to be opposites.

Indeed, we know that novice writers, during the act of composing, focus upon grammatical and mechanical concerns at the exclusion of larger matters, such as audience and content (Perl and Pianko). Such research, as well as practical experience, tell me that students are often so intimidated and overwhelmed by "words" and "language" and their accompanying blitz of rules that they often don't trust or consider imaginal thinking. If the works of Paivio, Kosslyn, and others attribute as much importance to imaginal processes as to verbal ones—and if still others, such as Arnheim, place visual thinking at the heart of cognition, then we are obligated to experiment and determine for ourselves the most effective uses of imagery in developing our students' literacy.

Following, then, are two assignments which emphasize imaginal processes as much as verbal ones. To some extent, both assignments, especially the first one, emphasize the "make believe" over the real, only in an attempt to accentuate mental imagery, and I should note that imaginal thinking can (and should) also be taught in non-make-believe contexts. Certainly, we should never restrict our imagery to make-believe contexts. We need to extend it to all forms of discourse. The "Entrance into Another World" assignment mainly defines imagery and increases students' awareness of it by immersing them in outside reading or electronic media of their own choosing, which is rich in a "homogeneous" or consistent use of imagery. Students develop their own images and write them, understanding from the outset that success with this task depends upon their generating enough dense and sharp imagery to gain "entrance" into this other world. This first

paper steeps students in imagery and prepares them for the next, more difficult and abstract assignment, the "Key Image-Idea" paper, which asks them to develop and describe one particular image, and then to write about the meaning of that image in more abstract language.

Both assignments challenge writers and require substantial investments of time and work. Although each assignment teaches additional skills, such as parody and satire in the first one, I do not emphasize them. Rather, I focus upon imagery and language. Both assignments strongly emphasize invention and revision processes, because students must organize their overlapping pools of associations into fairly complex observations, cast into coherent, clear, final prose. The instructions that follow are the actual written ones I provide for students. Special instructions for instructors appear in italics within parentheses. Of course, students need to discuss thoroughly any assigned reading, as well as all details of the tasks. Also, "reflective free writings" completed just before discussions can greatly benefit students, since most of them have never tried anything like these assignments. Finally, these assignments can be adapted to many levels. (See Appendix for a sample response to the Key Image-Idea assignment, completed by a college student.)

The Entrance into Another World Assignment

1. Select one "world" that you are interested in, one which you would like to enter and become a part of. This world should be a real one that is recorded and discussed in print and/or electronic media. For example, in "Dusk in Fierce Pajamas," E.B. White enters the world of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* magazines. Your world should be fairly common to most people; otherwise, your parody will appeal to a limited audience.

Therefore, the world you enter will be awaiting in genres or types of magazines, television programs, films, etc. *(The student excerpt quoted at the beginning of this article uses the world of Town and Country Magazine.)* One student writer jumped into the world of *Supercycle* and *Easy Rider* magazines, where "chrome shift levers shift chrome gears, chrome screws screw

chrome threads." Finally, since much of this paper's strength will depend upon your knowledge of the world you enter—what such people do, where they go, what they talk about, how they think—select a world which you already know well or want to learn about.

2. In preparing for this paper, begin with images of whatever world you select: Find photographs and study them in detail. For most people, this is the fastest way to "enter" this world.

3. This paper gains credibility mainly through the use of specifics: Find the right details, then develop, exploit, and make them highly visible. Again, note how White and the student examples make sharp use of visual detail.

4. In order to select—and consequently expand upon—the best people, things, places, and events in the world you choose, try to jump around in space and time. Note how White and the student writers accomplish this.

5. The bulk of your paper should develop a single incident, typical of the world you're entering. One to three "sub-plots" or minor incidents along the way will help submerge your reader into the world you've selected.

6. Like White's and the student examples, your piece should use no more than a good paragraph or two (commonly the beginning paragraphs, but not necessarily) which set up the situation for your daydream (or whatever) and deliver you into that world. In short, get into your world quickly, and make your entry interesting.

7. Use first person, and, once you're inside the world you've chosen, use the present tense only.

8. Your tone and point of view should be very straightforward from whichever persona you adopt. Write as an authentic resident of this world; talk straight from that resident's viewpoint.

9. As in White and the student examples, at only one place, toward the end of the paper, nudge your characters and/or events into complete absurdity. This single lapse into nonsense will give a final hard edge or climax to your parody/satire. These places will be discussed in class.

10. Suggested length: 5-7 typed, double-spaced pages.

The Key Image-Idea Assignment

1. Select one static or "frozen" image. It can be your earliest mental picture from childhood, or a mental image from later life. This image—however crazy it may seem—must be one that has stuck or lingered in your mind for reasons unknown. For example, one student chose the image of a group of people, each with wings and heads like birds, standing silently in a circle, in a pasture beyond his boyhood back yard. Another student chose the image of his grandfather's hands as they strummed a guitar. And yet another student selected an image from a recurring dream: a woodpecker hammering into a child's birthday cake, as all the party guests are playing "Going to Jerusalem" in another room. Give your initial selection careful thought, since your final paper will be most effective if you begin in relative ignorance about "what the image means." Also, keep in mind that the image you begin with—because it may change and evolve as we work through the assigned tasks—may not be exactly like the one you end up using in your final paper.

2. Read and discuss White's "The Ring of Time." *(Other selections can be substituted. White's essay, although not easy for students to immediately comprehend, is effective here, because it begins with the author watching a circus rehearsal in which a young girl rides bareback atop a horse going around a ring. White then speculates upon this "image," and his various ideas spread outward, like rings in a pond after a stone has dropped in. This "reflective" or meditative" structure helps students organize their papers.)*

3. Complete the following sequence of prewritings and turn them in with your final paper. Complete each writing in this

order. Label them with the appropriate letter. *(If possible, ask students to exchange these various prewritings for peer response, since the initial images will need to be "held up to language" and the perceptions of others, so that students verbally think through their entire writing process. During peer response, instructors should also assist and encourage students – to help students "tease out" their ideas.)*

A. In one or two pages, objectively describe your key image. Sharpen it. Detail it. Focus clearly by providing details about details. For example, with the woodpecker on the birthday cake, where is it sitting? What do its feet look like? What flavor is the cake? Are there decorations on top and/or a message? If so, what? You will have to invent some of this detail out of thin air, because your image may begin as vague. That's fine. Create details that you think are appropriate and honest—even if they are "made up." Generate as much detail as you can now, so you will have a large pool of detail to choose from later.

B. Revise your description of the image, further clarifying and sharpening it by selecting your most effective details, so that readers can easily visualize it. Try to select those "telling details" that will reveal the "essence" or "atmosphere" or "sense" of your image. That is, work hard to include those very idiosyncratic details—the ones which stand out from all the others, making your image unique. Capture the heart and soul of your image. For example, the woodpecker on the birthday cake is wearing a tiny, black tuxedo, and has very bright, small, yellow eyes.

C. Visualize your image moving in as many ways as possible: up, down, and sideways; expand it, shrink it, and wrinkle it. For example, the woodpecker grabs a miniature, decorative train car from atop the cake, then flutters straight up and hovers at the ceiling. After you have visualized several different motions, describe one in detail. Next, explain what you think about your image.

That is, did any of the movements affect the basic image? Did they alter your feelings or attitudes about it?

D. In your mind, combine your image with another image or images. Do this quickly. Play with several different combinations. For example, the woodpecker still sits atop the birthday cake, but the birthday cake rests in a balcony seat at an opera. After you have visualized several different combinations, briefly describe one or two combinations that you enjoyed the most. Write enough notes so that you can recall everything later. Next, explain what you think about your new image. That is, did any of these combinations significantly change what you had been thinking about your original, single image? Briefly explain.

E. In your mind, take your original image and transform it into something else. Do this several times, changing it into something different each time. For example, the woodpecker atop the cake can solidify into a black, flat, metal weather vane in the shape of a rooster, as the cake turns into a white barn beneath it. After you have played with several such transformations, select one or two of the most intriguing ones to describe, so that they could be recalled and developed later if necessary. Next, explain what you think about them. Did any of these transformations change your feelings and attitudes toward your original image? Explain.

F. Out of all the various "versions" of your original image that you played with in the writings above, select the one which intrigues you most. Note, however, that just because you have selected one version, all your other descriptions, notes, and ideas about the remaining versions are by no means useless. Keep those versions and refer back to them as you develop your paper.

G. Provide a name for your entire image (selected above) or for the dominant person or thing within the image. Think carefully about a name for this image,

however outlandish it may seem, that captures the atmosphere or sense of your mental picture. For example, the image of the opera-loving, tuxedo-clad woodpecker atop the birthday cake will be called "Arturo." Write the name down and explain why it fits this particular image.

H. List ten or more questions that you would like to ask this image. Select seven questions that you're most interested in, that you think would reveal the image's meaning and relevance. Next, write a dialogue between you (the questioner, labeled as "me") and the image. Address your image by name, as if you were talking to a friend. Answer all questions as if the image were a real person responding. Be as honest as possible. As in real interviews, if a response elicits another question, unplanned, follow the lead on out. During this prewriting, you must probe, and that means listening well and following up. Skip extra spaces between questions and answers and avoid quotation marks.
(Here, students need to sustain the dialogue, to keep following up on questions, pinning down their "interviewee." When this occurs, it usually doesn't take long for the image to acquire its own personality, another quality students should strive to develop in these dialogues.)

I. Complete a freewriting which explores, expands, and explains the major ideas you identify in your dialogue. Using the questions below, select one major idea to speculate upon.
(This phase asks students to directly apply language and propositional thinking to images. If a student has numerous ideas and cannot select one to focus on, have the student confer with a class member or with you. The primary challenge here – and fun – is to determine if several of the writer's ideas can be encompassed in a larger, single idea. Also, you may require that all students address all questions, or require that students respond to five or six questions of their choosing. If students' speculation leads them to an entirely different image they prefer working with, fine.)

Here, you are not creating images, but telling ABOUT them, clarifying the ideas, relationships and connections that surfaced in your dialogue. First, write for fifteen minutes, take a break, read what you wrote, and write for another fifteen minutes. Then repeat this process. Consider some or all of the following questions as you speculate and explain:

- How do a couple of your main ideas connect or relate to your image? How, specifically, are they related?
- How would you explain your major idea to a ten-year-old child?
- Which books, songs, poems, quotes, films, etc. relate to your image and idea? How?
- What are three smaller, supporting ideas of your main idea?
- What are some "causes" of your main idea?
- What are some "results" of your main idea?
- What is the opposite of your main idea?
- Who would most misunderstand your main idea? Under which circumstances?
- Which items or events—or groups of items or events—does your image encompass or connect? These can be real or imaginary.
- What is your idea similar to? Different from?
- What control does the image exercise over you?
- What control does the idea exercise over you?
- How does the image connect to your family? To your community or country?

J. Using all of your prewritings, notes, etc., from above, construct your essay (suggested length: 6–8 typed, double-spaced pages). Convert your dialogue and other informal writings into explanatory language which discusses the meaning of your image. First, discuss what the image means to you, personally. If you can generalize this meaning to others, discuss this as well.

Assume that your reader has not been through any of this process with you and is, therefore, unfamiliar with your images and ideas. Think of your essay's structure in

terms of White's "Ring of Time"—like a stone being dropped into a pond, with rings of meaning radiating from your central image or idea. Your central or "core" description of the image will "show," while the succeeding rings of explanation will "tell." *(The "Entrance into Another World" assignment provides a good opportunity to establish this distinction.)*

K. Here is some advice for organizing your paper. Your first (and possibly only) key image should appear early in your paper, followed by your discussion of it. This discussion can consider various ideas which lead to the one you believe in most; in this approach, your readers can actively follow your trail of thought, so it must lead somewhere definite. Another organizational approach is to begin with explanation about the image and quickly move into your key image description.

L. Organize your paper. The parts of your paper should proceed according to a plan, and not, like a pinball, bounce from one image or idea to another. After you've completed most of your writing, I'll ask to see a map, outline, or list of your main sections and subsections. Hence, group information in ways that will make sense for readers. Especially with this type of paper, "idea transitions" are extremely important for achieving overall coherence, so you might connect your image (or parts of it) to carefully selected parts of your discussion, three or four times throughout the paper. One final note: don't be afraid to use some humor in such a piece, but use it sparingly and wisely.

Conclusion

Students usually have much fun with the "Entrance into Another World" assignment. In fact, their playfulness with this project indicates their immersion in imagery, which is precisely the point. Also, most students, on some level, become aware

that imagery generates an explosion of ideas for writing—another point of this assignment. Once the "Entrance" paper is completed, discuss with the whole class how the assignment helped students generate a wealth of ideas and images for writing.

Students become highly focused, and hence immersed, in the "Key Image-Idea" paper as well. However, in this assignment, they are more consciously playing language off against imagery, and vice-versa—tugging at words, then tugging at pictures to grow ideas. If students truly begin with some kind of key image about which they know little, they work harder and learn more. In this paper, too, students should transform and manipulate their imagery and accept each evolved version as legitimate. They need to know that it's okay if they end up with entirely different images and ideas from their original. Such convoluted journeys—zigzagging down and up words and around and through images—take us to our best thinking.

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APPENDIX

Sample Response to the Key Image-Idea Assignment

RECOMPENSE

It is a faded picture, this image I still hold. My thoughts recall the browns and sepias of the Sunday *Des Moines Register* featuring rotogravures of parades, fashions, and notables. This mind picture, too, bears that mellow color. And it is wrinkled and blotched, as if it has been often wadded and tossed with poor aim at a trash basket. The picture shows a family clustered in the living room of a house. They are grouped around a piano, an old upright, wood-grained in oak with a few braided wood trims here and there, and huge gargoyle-like, carved oak feet.

Seated on an oak piano bench, my sister Curly has her attention focused on the hymnal propped on the front of the piano. On either side, other books are balanced to hold the hymn book open. Two gooseneck lamps rest on the top of the piano and hang their shades and bulbs spider-like over the edge and down, focusing their light on the music. Mother stands behind Curly, her leg touching the bench, and she is turned slightly so that the light will reflect on the hymn book she is holding, open, in her hands. Her double-thick glasses reflect some of this light. She is still wearing her apron over her work dress, her hands still soft and moist from dishwater.

A foot or so away, Dad is leaning against the wide archway that was meant to distinguish the front room from the dining room, but used by us as one large room. He holds his

book up to catch the light from the chandelier behind him, and adjusts his horn-rimmed reading glasses. He wears his customary dark blue bib overalls and light blue chambray workshirt. In the corner to his right, his down-to-the-chin briar pipe rests on a cradle stand. On the same table, the evening *Gazette*, folded to the finished crossword puzzle, lays next to the new phone with its extra long base for the dial insert—a temporary update for the old upright telephone.

I stand on my sister's left, a bit apart, looking at the three of them. My mind senses a triangle: Mother, Dad, and Curly. A violin is tucked under my right elbow, nestled to my side, with my left hand crossing over to the violin's neck. My right hand holds the violin bow in a relaxed downward slant.

We four were the subjects of the picture, a family pose. Four. But a triangle has only three sides. We were never four. We were three and one. We had love, but it was not open, and it was not united. We lived together. And I could not break the triangle lines . . . become a fourth, to make a rectangle.

Adjacent to the piano, near where I am standing, is an ornamental iron plant stand that curls to a platform that holds a struggling fern. From its weedy center, fronds straggle out in awkward directions. Beside it, dodging a frond, is an old oak library table, its bottom shelf piled with loose sheet music and old *Etude* magazines. Newer music books and other music exercise sheets are stacked in one corner on the top, with a folded metal music rack tossed on the pile. The top of the table also holds the opened violin case with shirred purple velvet interior, and behind that is another unopened black, imitation leather case much the same size and shape. It holds my viola.

We will have a vacant viola spot in the symphony next year, Dr. Richards said. If you will work even harder, you can be assured of that viola position, and the college scholarship. It will cover most of your expenses. But you must decide now *what you want to do, because you will need a year of hard work on your viola.*

In my picture, behind Dad's silhouette, a large round oak table has a crocheted centerpiece holding a cut-glass bowl, empty except for a few pencils, a note pad, and a spool of white thread into which a needle has been skewered. (Mother believes in immediate replacement of buttons.) On the far side, near a lace curtained window, a flowerpot placed on a folded newspaper contains a hopeful geranium. The lace curtain has been pulled aside to coax any available sun.

It can't be the water I use on my plants, Mother moaned. Mrs. Sprague next door uses the same water, same fertilizer. It's simply because I work with Dad, and don't have time for my plants. Everybody has plants; they make a home. (She thought bushy, healthy, houseplants were part of being a good housewife, or mother. Ah, Mother!)

On the big oak table are other items, for it is the catchall where everybody deposits whatever is being carried. Some folded ironed pieces are in a stack—pillowcases, sheets, handkerchiefs—ironed after school, not yet put away. Two tan sacks are on another edge, rolled down from carrying. The sacks contain one pound each of jellybeans and Spanish peanuts, purchased that day at Mays, at nine cents each. These specials are always limited to one pound each per customer. Curly purchased her limit during lunch break from Iowa Business School; I did my purchase while transferring buses from the viola try-out at college.

It was nearly a ritual that when Mays had the jellybean-Spanish peanut sale we would have an evening of High Five. Dad and I were always partners for this simple card game, and we nearly always won, stuffing ourselves throughout. Curly didn't like being the loser, so she ate more to compensate.

The table is out of focus for all of the picture, but it also holds a notebook and textbook for my weekend studying and a folder containing my viola music.

I'm sure you understand, daughter, Dad said. Your mother still cries with guilt from letting Curly fall from that baby buggy. One leg will always be shorter. You've accepted all these

years of expenses and hospital trips; surely you agree with Mother and me that Curly must finish business school. We can't afford both her school and your college.

But Dad! It's a year away. Say maybe, at least . . .

The catchall table still shows an assortment of things. There are some coins left over from bus fare, tossed there for whoever needs fare money next. And in the center, Curly has dropped her earrings and beads. Her imitation leather purse lays open, with some church bulletins sticking out the top. She stopped by church on the way home and, of course, saw Lewis, the preacher's son.

Curly, I pleaded, why don't you tell Dad? Tell him you and Lewis mean to marry soon.

No. I'm the one who's always wanted to study music. Dad forced me to go to business school because I'm a cripple. It's not fair that you should have music when I couldn't have what I wanted. And Lewis will need help for his ministry training and I'll have to work. Besides, you have two good legs to take you down the Lord's path . . . .

Swinging back into focus, my picture shows Dad's chair between the table and his leaning figure. It is an unusual, high-back, wood veneer chair—he can lean his head back, sitting—and though it has chips and cracks, and some reinforcement wires near the rockers, it is not to be disposed of under any circumstances. If others dare sit in it, they move when Dad comes into the room.

Mother, it isn't fair, I cried. I only want a chance to go on with my music. I'll have a college scholarship. Think of me *this once. When we were little, you constantly guarded that I didn't hurt Curly, even as she was hurting me. We're grown now, and I should have a chance.*

Now, daughter, that's quite unChristian of you. Your sister needs our help—and God's.

Mother, why do you talk like the Bible?

Well, Curly feels we should become more involved in the church.

The dimming picture moves as Curly strikes the opening chord. The three of them sing, and I tuck my viola into my shoulder, thinking, but not singing, the words, "I Come to the Garden Alone."