

ANALECTA XVII

The Student Literary Journal of The University of Texas at Austin



Wes Anderson

Charles Falling

As the left wing rose and he was pressed into his seat, sunlight crossed onto his face. He reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a pair of tortoise shell sunglasses. He raised them up to his face and paused, squinting out the window, glasses poised, his pose at that moment not unlike that of the Milanese tennis player on the cover of the magazine in his lap. He put on the glasses and crossed his legs.

"Grapefruit juice and mineral water," he said fast to the flight attendant, and turned the page to Letter from Frisco.

"We don't have it. I'm sorry."

"No grapefruit?"

"We have other juices. How's tomato?"

"Well, it's fine, but I'm allergic. I get the shakes."

"Oh. Well, I don't know."

He nodded. The flight attendant waited beside him, pencil horizontal an inch from the paper. He clasped his hands behind his neck and stared straight ahead. His concentration was briefly intense.

"Oh, wow." his shoulders fell: "Better just make it a Scotch and soda."

The flight attendant flashed an extravagant smile and went on to the next passenger.

The seat beside him was vacant but across the aisle was something to which, by free association, he would have responded with the one word "suicide." She was wearing a long, tight skirt, red lipstick, and a cross that he remembered. It had her name on the back. Christy Moore, engraved in cursive. Black strands dangled to her cheekbones and he stared as if through one way glass.

A cup was in his hand. He took a sip. "Oh, hey, where's the little bottle?"

The flight attendant said, "Right here," and set it down. "It's two dollars."

"I'll start a tab." He stirred ice with his finger.

"We can't really do that. The flight's just forty minutes."

"Oh." He nodded. "Ah." He pulled a wad of ones out of his pocket and paid. He took another sip and looked at Christy Moore. She saw him and stared right back. This much he observed, but as if he were invisible. He continued to stare. She waved, one quick sweep of the hand; it was like smelling salts. He froze up.

"Charlie," she said.

"Hey. Hi." He took off his glasses and dropped them on the floor.

"How's it going?"

"It's going all right."

She nodded. "Good."

They looked at each other for a second. Charlie tried to run through a list he was working on of things to talk about when he couldn't think of anything; he couldn't think of anything. He shifted his gaze to the seatback in front of her. He said, "Yeah." He turned his head slowly back to his magazine. He sat very still and stared at the page. The words were disconnected: Nixon, Aspen, "a gathering of saints." He glanced sideways and saw her go back to a little red novel called *Sundays with Belinda*. It was propped up on her knees. She turned the page.

Charlie read Sagittarius three times and then Leo.

He looked up and she was watching him. She opened her mouth. A man in an anklelength yellow slicker swept down the aisle between them. His vinyl belt trailed behind him in the air, streaming across her forearm. She watched him disappear through curtains and then she turned back to Charlie. "So, hey. How's the Andrea Doria," she asked, in reference to Charlie's stealthy maroon Volkswagon Microbus.

"Wrecked it," he said.

"Did you? How?"

"Off a bridge. Now the sunroof's welded shut."

"Oh, no. That's terrible." She pulled a lock of hair away from her eyes, drawing it back behind her ear, which triggered somehow the recollection of a soccer field, short thin grass, some October when he and Mitchell Sloane had seen the girls' team play. He remembered standing behind a chain-link fence, watching her at midfield. She scored two goals. She had tape on her leg and dirt on the white sleeves of her jersey.

The magazine slid off his lap and hit the floor, pages twisted and ripping with astonishing violence. He leaned down and picked it up, smoothing the pages deliberately. He looked over at her.

"Careful," she said.

He nodded. "Right."

She closed her book on its jacket. She held it with both hands. She pointed at the empty seat beside her and shrugged. Charlie stared. He grabbed the edge of his armrest with the intention of propelling himself smoothly, airborne, across the aisle and snug under the seatbelt adjacent to her elbow; but then, as quickly, reconsidered: pointing at a seat, that gesture might mean anything. He was motionless, hunched over, knuckles turning white.

"Why don't you sit here," she said.

"Where?"

"Right here. It's not taken."

"The seat beside you there?"

She nodded a slow suspicious affirmative. As he stood and crossed the aisle, transferring his bag of magazines from underneath to overhead, he tried to suppress what he believed to be a broad smile crossing his face. The effect was in fact a tight-jawed grimace, the look of a skipper going down with the ship. Christy Moore bit her lip.

He sat down.

They talked about siblings. Her sister was at Columbia Physicians and Surgeons, his brothers were still shooting game in Appalachia. The flight attendant took his empty cup and they ordered two more. There wasn't a lot to say. They'd never been too close. She'd once given him a birthday card with a check for three dollars. She used to sit beside him in the hall and write notes on his bookcovers. She even told him whenever he was in a dream she had, which seemed to be a lot, always riding a ten-speed, but it didn't mean anything. It's just the way she was. With everybody. Of course, just the same, he didn't cash the check. He kept it for a bookmark. He was a guy who sometimes parked his car in the garage at three a.m., turned off the lights and sat there

until the tape ran out.

They got their drinks. "Oh, and hey," she said, "I heard you went to Singapore."

"You heard that? That fell through."

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah. I had a little problem at the very last minute."

"Oh, that's right, I guess. The thing with Chase Manhattan."

"The what? How do you know about that?"

"I don't know. Somebody told me."

"Who told you?"

"I don't know. Maybe Mitchell Sloane. Why?"

"Why? Well, as you might expect, I was wondering how that came up. In conversation."

She bit hard on her thumbnail. "I can't remember. Why?"

"Why? Well, it's kind of personal, don't you think? I mean, my financial situation? Was this just small talk?"

She looked at her knees. She exhaled and set down her drink. "Actually," she said, looking both ways and whispering as if wary of hidden mikes, "Actually, I asked him about you, Charlie."

Charlie nodded. His ears were popping. "Oh. Did you? Why?"

She shut her eyes and took a breath and then slowly the lids came up. "I always ask about you, Charlie."

"Ah." He nodded. "I see." He felt a strong urge to pull on a ripcord. A blonde little girl in a yellow bathing suit had said to him, as he unlocked his bike from a nine foot magnolia tree, "You know Christy Moore? She told me all about you." He didn't know who this kid was or that she hadn't tragically mistaken his identity, and he rode home at speeds shifting in turn from slow coasting to head-down, comet-chasing ultrasonic. He bit his nails into the skin that summer and he finally had to just wear gloves.

"I didn't know that," he said.

"Uh-huh."

"No, I mean, what do you mean?"

"Come on, Charlie." She finished her drink and gave him a cold hard look. She smiled.

"I don't think I understand," he said.

She laughed. "That's OK. Don't worry."

The light went on for seatbelts and no smoking and Charlie felt as if he were under water. The knot in his tie was slowly slipping. He said, "Excuse me," and stood up.

The flight attendant stopped him halfway to the back. "Sir, the captain has activated the —"

"I'll only be a second." He lurched sideways into the lavatory and pulled the latch. He turned to the mirror, mouth wide open, and looked at himself. He put his hands on the countertop. He slowly, slowly shook his head back and forth. The walls were metal and there were vibrations and wind noise. He splashed water on his face and dried off with his sleeve. He pressed down his lapels, ran his fingers through his hair, and narrowed

his eyes. He took a breath and held it. The lock snapped open and the door swung wide.

The plane seemed to be rolling left like a jet fighter as he walked down the aisle. He steadied himself on every couple of orange and aqua seatbacks.

He sat down with Christy Moore. She said, "Are you OK?"

"Yeah. I'm fine."

"Are you sick?"

"I'm not sick."

She put her hand on his sleeve. She opened her mouth and then closed it. He could see that her nails were painted blue and he didn't look up. "Well," she said, and took away her hand. "Buckle up."

They were landing. The flaps went up and the engines roared. They touched down three times staccato and rumbled onto the runway. He was dizzy and he felt that it might at this squealing, shattering moment be the easiest thing in the world for him to wrap his arms around this girl and say, "Why fight it?"

He watched her stare out the window as they taxied to the terminal.

Everyone stood up and latches started clicking. Charlie leaned down to get his bag and saw his sunglasses under the seat across the aisle. He unsnapped his belt and crossed over to get them. He sat down and leaned over. He couldn't quite reach them. His nose was an inch from the carpet and he could see Adidas up ahead. His shirt was untucking. He felt a hand on his back and he slammed his head into plastic and aluminum. His vision turned blue and fuzzy but he could hear three slow words, "See you, Charlie." He grasped his sunglasses in his fist and dragged himself up. He rubbed his eyes and saw Christy Moore step backwards into the aisle, blocking a stream of people. She waved.

"Yeah, see you," he said. He dropped his glasses. He watched Christy Moore turn away and the line of people swept past him behind her. He stood up and tried to cut in. No one was stopping. His head was bent over sideways beneath the overhead racks and his neck was already starting to ache. He looked to the front and couldn't see her. He stepped into the aisle and broadsided an executive, shoulder to shoulder, slamming him into his briefcase against the side of the opposing seat. The guy said, "Whoa!"

"Yeah, whoa!" said Charlie. "I'm sorry." He let the guy go ahead. He looked back at his seat and sat down, arms at his sides, in a slouch. His face was close to the window and he could see baggage carts and a 727. He let the crowd die down.

He was thinking of this time she walked up beside him at his locker in the empty hallway after school. She told him to put out his hand. She gave him a crumbling carnation. It was turning brown but it still had a scent. The plane was empty now and he leaned back in his seat. He remembered sitting on the roof outside his window that night, cool moonlight and a breeze, dry leaves around his ankles. There was music next door. The pool was blue below him. He was twisting this wilted little flower in his fingers and it felt like there were possibilities. He reclined and stretched his arms out wide on the shingles.

The engine quit and Charlie looked up. He put his hand to his head. He picked up his bag and hung it over his shoulder. He walked down the aisle of the empty plane.

Wes Anderson: photo not available.

Christine Barton's poems have appeared in several small-press publications throughout the state including *Analecta* (Austin), *Verve* (Austin), *Words and Phrases* (Austin), *Thought Crime* (Beaumont) and other magazines in the Houston area. She was named Feature Poet in *Verve*, *Words and Phrases*, and *Thought Crime* and recognized "for excellence in poetry" by both the National Foundation for Advancement of the Arts and former Texas Governor Bill Clements. She has also participated in several poetry readings both in the Beaumont area and in Austin, including Poetry Circus with local poet David Jewel. She has won first place in a poetry reading contest sponsored by the Dead Poet's Society, a campus organization, and in the 1991 spring writing contest sponsored by the University's English department.

J.B. Bird is currently a graduate student at UT's Institute of Latin American Studies, where he concentrates on Spanish-American literature. In 1986, he graduated from Williams College in Western Massachusetts, where he won the Academy of American Poets prize and studied with the poet Louise Glück.

Suzanne Bost was born into a conservative, loving, and very dedicated Midwestern Catholic family and was raised to be an engineer. Now she is studying English and Spanish Literature at UT, and plans to go on to graduate school to study contemporary literature. She has wanted to be a writer since she was five years old. And, now that she has advanced past the level of writing doggie and kitty stories in crayon, she takes her writing very seriously. So far, she has had her work published in *Analecta* and some minor literary magazines, and she has read her poetry here and there. Hopefully, here and there will continue to expand, and dedication and involvement will allow her to have a successful career and a happy life as a poet and professor of literature.

Randy Brieger, a native Mississippian, has recently had poems or stories published in *Buffalo Press*, *Hawai'i Review*, *Thema*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *The James White Review*. His play, *United States*, a comedy/drama about Siamese twins, will be produced this spring at the University of Houston as part of Edward Albee's production workshop. Brieger works with the Writers in the Schools program, serves as editor of *Gulf Coast*, a magazine of art and literature, and is finishing his Masters in Creative Writing and Literature this spring at the University of Houston.

Joshua Clover has just completed the program at Iowa and spent the summer teaching poetry and taking dance classes. *Madonna rules*. Stuff forthcoming in *APR*, *Denver Quarterly*.

Sean M. Dineen is a Junior in English. Veteran of Catholic school, slowly recovering. First press publishing. "Does the government get this information?"

Melissa Durbin will receive a Master's degree in Business Administration from UT in August of 1992, but plans to continue writing even after becoming a slave in corporate America.

Pat Falconer received her BFA in Studio Art from UT in the spring of 1991. She attends graduate school at Maryland Art Institute in Baltimore, where she hopes to pursue a career as an extra in John Waters' films.

Geoff Hoffman is a sophomore English major at the University of New Hampshire where he edits UNH's literary journal, *Aegis*: Room 153 MUB, Durham, NH 03824.