

against the glass that separates
him from his instincts.

the backyard toad we seldom see
except when he lets himself in from
the patio on a hot night and surreptitiously
seeks refuge behind the television set.
then i grab him with a paper towel and
he sinks his fingers and toes into the
carpet as i gently separate him from
the middle-class comforts to which he
apparently aspires.

the glassed-in toad will never know
freedom. the backyard toad, who with
a modicum of strategy could probably
escape, chooses carpeting over loam.

neither of them has much of a sex life.

ONLY IN FRISCO

returning from the men's room to
the fern-bar at the san francisco airport,
i hear, "jane has found that her new family
welcomed her kind words and gestures."

and i glanced up at one of the ubiquitous
t.v.s to discover an attractive white
woman surrounded by chimpanzees.

"what are we watching, a fucking tarzan flick?"
i complained to my buddy, larry kramer, and
larry, the kindest of poets, did his best
to suppress a wheeze of mirth as he
informed me, "gerry, that's jane goodall."

FLIRTING WITH DISASTER

for one evening, a few months ago,
i really thought that she and i
would end up married to each other,
even though we already both are married
elsewhere. we had a lot in common and
seemed to appreciate each other a lot
more than either of us was being appreciated
at home.

then last night over drinks
my jokes kept being taken as attacks,
there was a slashing irrational tone
in her voice that i recognized all too well.

i knew she hadn't been feeling well, but
a lot of people haven't been well. some
people haven't felt well for years. how do
i know that she wouldn't keep feeling ill
and touchy long into the indefinite future?
maybe there's something about me makes
women feel not well at all. some of them,
at least. maybe, eventually, all of them.

PARADISE REMEMBERED

when we leave the patio door ajar
on a hot summer night
the toad invariably hops into our family room.

i wrap my hand in a towel,
like a wart-prophylactic,
before picking him up.

as i carry him outside and lower him gently
into the bushes, he expresses his emotions
in a very high pitch. my wife says, "you're
squeezing him," but i know i haven't
been. "no," i say, "what he doesn't like
is that i momentarily tipped him upside-down."

to be on one's back: that is the nightmare
of toads and tortoises.

a man's is to be on his knees; a woman's,
on her belly.

ELECTION '92: FAMILY VALUES

early in this century mikhail bakhtin was
already pointing out that communal values were
indeed necessary for social discourse, but
that as long as they were assumed in common
they were never verbalized: they were tacitly
accepted by all. it was only, he went on to
observe, when those values were breaking down,
deteriorating, being challenged, undermined,
and replaced, that they began to be prominently,
if not in fact ubiquitously, debated.

— Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA