

SIX PROSE PIECES

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing

Marion Sturgeon  
December 1987  
Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts  
at Bard College  
Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 12504

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Beached	1
The Holy Picture	2
Photograph	5
Home	7
The Lindbergh Story	8
Letters From Truffaut	13

## BEACHED

Further up, dunes of giant forms are strewn, lying apart, then together; as though one was nothing but the absence of the other. Along these hills of breasts and thighs, a flank nestles in the crook of an arm and an iron bar pressed with yellow and grey lichen emerges like a dry tongue. The air impelled by uncertainty, settles the forms in new round inventions. Troubled by the dampness hidden in the shadows and wounded by the sun's heat, you burrow in the pelvic delta throbbing like a heart. The sea rushes out recklessly and flies up white as the sand pipers scurry among the sticks and straws their bills are perpendicular with mad intentions. Light falls on the grey pebbles and sad shells shorn of their inhabitants wash in. The gulls swirling in eccentric circles tip and plunge. They call -- are, are.

The sun pulls the sky toward itself and drops like falling fire. You are in the dark only the sea shines with star light. The sand grows cold. What remains pools under the rocks and around the pebbles and corks, parting the thin grasses, climbing the great trochanter, filling the space between the base of the chest and the illiac crest, depressing the lower lid, and holding itself several fingers breath over the orbit of the eye, makes its sovereign way.

## THE HOLY PICTURE

There was no hope for Sister Maxentia; the illness had struck deep into the marrow and they said recovery was doubtful. Day after day she returned to the classroom wondering if her teacher would be there and whether things would be as they were. She knew then the memory of this time would fade till it would seem like a dream and that was all. But as she entered the room, her classmates were still unattended and taking full advantage of their freedom -- glad the teacher was absent. They had created so much noise that the teacher from the next classroom had to come in and scold them for shaming the high reputation of their class. She felt humiliated and wondered what her teacher would say to them. She imagined her lying in a bed as white as the cloth surrounding her face, with the black robes spread out, her feet in the large sturdy shoes with the leather creased in lines across the top. This picture of her would loom up at the foot of her bed after the lights were turned off. It filled her with fear yet she wanted to get closer and make certain she had not caused the deadly disease.

Sister Maxentia taught school subjects around a large square table. She taught a few students at a time and the remaining students stayed at their desks busy reading or reciting their lessons quietly to each other. Sometimes she left them at the table for only a short moment while she

helped one of the other students and it was during one of these times that the girl took a fateful step. The sister's prayer book lay open at her elbow. In a moment of impulse and quick action, she slipped the holy picture from the book and put it in her workbook. It was an act of such daring that she could not be sure that it happened till she returned to her room and touched the picture. On the back she read the inscription: -- "a garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse: a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." She could not decipher the name but she could read Deutschland. She wondered each day when her teacher would discover the deed and lived in dread of that moment. . . . .

As she took her place at her desk in the back of the room, she would examine the nun's face for any suggestion that she knew. The starched cloth that framed her teacher's face squeezed her features together severely. Around her neck protruded a white, oval collar that trembled up and down with her slightest breath. A black habit draped from her head and whenever she moved the clothing twisted itself into new folds covering and revealing other layers underneath. The nun often pushed it back from the shoulder the way women do with long hair that manages to fall in the way. At the start of each school day the teacher led them in morning prayer. From within the folds of her voluminous garment she retrieved her prayer book; she covered it entirely with her large hands folded together. Then with a deft flip unfolded her hands and the book fell open to the correct page. When