

Our car boiled over again just after my mother and I crossed the Continental Divide. While we were waiting for it to cool we hear, from somewhere above us, the bawling of an airhorn. The sound got louder and then a big truck came around the corner and shot past us into the next curve, its trailer shimmying wildly. We stared after it. "Oh, Toby," my mother said, "he's lost his brakes."

The sound of the horn grew distant, then faded in the wind that sighed in the trees all around us.

From Tobias Wolff's *This Boy's Life: A Memoir*

I spy on my patients. Ought not a doctor to observe his patients by any means and from any stance, that he might more fully assemble evidence? So I stand in the doorways of hospital rooms and gaze. Oh, it is not all that furtive an act. Those in bed need only look up to discover me. But they never do.

From the doorway of Room 542 the man in the bed seems deeply tanned. Blue eyes and close-cropped white hair give him the appearance of vigor and good health. But I know that his skin is not brown from the sun. It is rusted, rather, in the last stage of containing the vile repose within. And the blue eyes are frosted, looking inward like the windows of a snowbound cottage. This man is blind. This man is also legless—the right leg missing from midthigh down, the left from just below the knee. It gives him the look of a bonsai, roots and branches pruned into the dwarfed facsimile of a great tree.

From Richard Selzer's "The Discus Thrower"

I was saved from sin when I was going on thirteen. But not really saved. It happened like this. There was a big revival at my Auntie Reed's church. Every night for weeks there had been much preaching, singing, praying, and shouting, and some very hardened sinners had been brought to Christ, and the membership of the church had grown by leaps and bounds. Then just before the revival ended, they held a special meeting for children, "to bring the young lambs to the fold." My aunt spoke of it for days ahead. That night I was escorted to the front row and placed on the mourners' bench with all the other young sinners, who had not yet been brought to Jesus.

From Langston Hughes' "Salvation"

I came up off the bench slowly, working my fingers up into my helmet to get at my ears. As I crossed the sidelines I was conscious then only of moving into the massive attention of the crowd, but seeing ahead out of the opening of my helmet the two teams waiting. Some of the defense were already kneeling at the line of scrimmage, their heads turned so that helmeted, silver, with the cages protruding, they were made to seem animal and impersonal--wildlife of some large species disturbed at a waterhole--watching me come toward them. Close to, suddenly there was nothing familiar about them. With the arc of lights high up on the standards, the interiors of their helmets were shadowed--perhaps with the shine of a cheekbone, the glint of an eye--no one was recognizable, nor a word from them. I trotted by the ball. Its trade name "Duke" was face up. The referee was waiting, astride it, a whistle at the end of black cord dangling from his neck. The offensive team in their blue jerseys, about ten yards back, on their own twenty-yard line, moved, and collected in the huddle formation as I came up, and I slowed, and walked toward them, trying to be calm about it, almost lazying up to them to see what could be done.

From George Plimpton's *Paper Lion*