

*Abraham Verghese*

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## LILACS

(from *The New Yorker*)

Bobby sits up on the side of the bed. He feels weak, spinnyc-headed, and hollow. In a little while he tugs at the bedspread and wraps it around himself. Using the chest of drawers and the television for handholds, he stumbles to the air-conditioning unit below the window. He leans over the gray box, turning his head away from the cold blast, fumbling till he finds the concealed door to the control panel, and then blindly punches buttons till it turns off.

He draws the curtain back cautiously. He stares out at the motel parking lot for several minutes, focusing on any movement that might suggest he is being watched. Over the high wall behind the parking lot he sees the blue-green span of Tobin Bridge and, beyond that, the Boston skyline. The parking lot has filled up overnight. He sees Massachusetts plates, New Hampshire plates—an Indiana plate on a jeep reads **HOO-SIER HOSPI-TALITY**.

**FIRST IN THE WAITING ROOM.** That would be on his license plate. If he had a car. When he walked into the motel lobby the previous night, it had smelled of coriander. The manager, an Indian, had stared at him with alarm. “No vehicle?” he said. Behind the counter, a door stood open, revealing a woman’s fat leg on a recliner; a silver toe ring looked welded onto her sec-

ond toe. There were the murmurs of a TV and the shrill voices of children speaking in another language. Bobby peeled three hundred-dollar bills from his roll, and the man’s manner softened considerably. “What it is happened to your face?” the man asked, coming close to Bobby. The woman in the recliner stuck her head around to look.

“Oh, I was born this way,” Bobby had answered. He had smiled at the fat woman, who quickly retracted her head.

The bathroom is cold. He brushes his teeth with the bedspread still wrapped around him. He tries not to look into the mirror. Why look? Better to remember himself as he used to be. As he is in the photograph in the briefcase—a photograph Primo took. It is from Myrtle Beach, the summer of 1973, when he was twenty-one years old. In the photograph his hair comes down to his shoulders. He is bare-chested, sitting sideways on Primo’s ’64 Harley, one hand on the tank and the other resting lightly on his thigh—his own thigh. He is smiling—a strong smile, a smile of certainty. Primo had said something to make him smile, something flattering, and his Fu Manchu mustache looks innocent, young. In the background is Primo’s airplane, and beyond that, faintly, the sea, though in the photograph it blurs with the blue of the sky. Carolina blue.

In those days, Bobby worked as a manager in the Myrtle Mystery Mall, selling tokens for the peephole dioramas, supervising the soda and trinket concessions, keeping the lines flowing through the Dinosaur Cyclorama, shooing out the couples who lingered in the dark recesses of the Polynesian Fire-Walk of Love. He was ten years old the first summer his parents brought him to Myrtle Beach. They drove down from Spartanburg and rented a “cottage” (in reality, a double-wide trailer) for two weeks in late July, in what became an annual family ritual. Bobby, an only child, distracted, suffering again that summer with bad eczema, spent most of his time and all of his allowance in the Myrtle Mystery Mall. He thrilled to its dark, paneled interiors, the dim, red

glow of the Chinese lanterns, the labyrinth of doors and corridors leading to exhibits, but most of all he thrilled to being part of the clique of boys who hung around in their flowery sports shirts and shades and seemed unofficially to preside over the whole phantasmagoria. They encouraged him to disobey the **HANDS OFF** sign on the Iron Maiden in the Gallery of Torture; they laughed when he tested the blade edge of the guillotine with his tongue; and later, sitting in a prop room, they let him sip from the silver hip flask that they were passing around—a mark of his acceptance. He much preferred their company to baking on the beach with his parents or sitting mute in the backseat while his father, talking nonstop, inched the Buick into the family cavalcade that went up and down the strip in search of a different fast-food joint for the evening.

The year his father died, Bobby dropped out of the English honors program at Appalachian State and moved to Myrtle Beach, landing a job in his old hangout. Every day, Bobby caught triptychs of himself in the Distortion Gallery; Bobbys were catapulted out of one mirror and reeled back into another: thin Bobbys, fat Bobbys. In the evenings, Bobby went to the Connection, and there he saw himself reflected in the eyes of guys from Johnson City, Fayetteville, Raleigh, wherever. They would cluster around him, buy him drinks, while he looked over the tops of their heads. One night he saw Primo come in, look around, and leave before Bobby could get near him—it was the only time Bobby had seen a better-lookung man than himself in the place. Primo had returned in an hour, dressed in leather. This time Bobby walked over, scattering the people around them.

“If I had known,” Bobby said, fingering the straps on Primo’s shoulders, “I would have worn my skins.”

“It’s not too late,” Primo said. They didn’t make it out of the parking lot.

He rinses off the toothbrush. He has no razor, and, in any case, his beard barely grows anymore. He runs a washcloth over

his face and works the corners of his eyes. His eyelashes have grown long and translucent and have curled up at the ends—a side effect of AZT, according to Dr. Chatupadia. Of the six doctors in the clinic at Boston Metropolitan, four are from India, one is from Pakistan, and one is a Palestinian. Chatupadia, who has been Bobby’s physician ever since Bobby moved to Boston nine years ago, took a photograph of Bobby’s closed eyelids with the eyelashes dangling and sent it to *The New England Journal of Medicine*. Chatupadia was disappointed when they sent the photograph back, saying that what it showed was now a well-described side effect of AZT. He showed the letter to Bobby. “‘Well-described,’ they are calling it, Bobby!” he said, pronouncing it *Boobee*. “These people,” Chatupadia said, and he wagged his head from side to side, letting the silence stand for all the injustice in his life and Bobby’s life. Bobby agreed. *Thesepeople . . .*

These people had no place for Bobby. These people were waiting for him to die. Even Chatupadia seemed to regard his longevity, his hanging on despite plummeting weight and daily fevers, as an aberration. He was a bird without wings, suspended in midair, defying the ground below. His Social Security supplement, even with Medicaid, could not support him. It didn’t cover the medications for the infections—the opportunists—that threatened to kill him before the AIDS virus did. Five days earlier, after waiting for three months, Bobby was turned down from the only multicenter interferon trial in Boston. Because his white-blood-cell count was too low, Chatupadia said.

“But my count is low *because* of the AIDS!”

“So sorry, Boobee. They won’t allow it.”

The other interferon trial in the United States was in Durham. He didn’t have the money to go to Durham, but he called anyway, not telling them his white count. “Sorry, we are fully enrolled,” a tired male voice had said. “And the study protocol only allows our own patients — our own AZT failures — to be enrolled.”

“What if I came down there and waited on your doorstep?” Bobby asked.

They had a waiting list of three hundred. The doorstep was full. “Just give me *some* of the drug! You don’t understand—I have no more rope to hang on to.”

But they couldn’t. Protocol.

*These people* . . . But Bobby cannot give up. He cannot. He will not give them that satisfaction. He will go to the clinic today, as he has done every Wednesday these nine years. He will be first in the waiting room, as always. He will sit there and show everyone that he lacks neither determination nor, as of last night, money. And he will remind them of their impotence.

“We are an army of Boobees, an army with overgrown eyelashes,” Bobby says to the shrouded figure in the mirror. His voice echoes in the bathroom, and he speaks even louder: “Across this great country, our army is converging on city hospitals. We will assemble in the waiting rooms. We will wait for the clinics to open. We will be treated—we Americans—by our Indian, our Pakistani, our Filipino, our Palestinian doctors: the drones. Upstairs, the queen bees will be working on the cure, appearing on television, writing for the journals.”

Someone bangs on the wall next door. “Fuck you!” Bobby shouts, but he has lost enthusiasm for his speech.

He pulls his T-shirt on, trying not to snag it on his Hickman catheter. The catheter enters above his right nipple and then tunnels under the skin to pierce the large vein beneath his collarbone and extend through it till it reaches the vein just above his heart. For two years the Hickman has been his lifeline. It has spared him countless needles; blood for testing has been drawn out of it, and all his intravenous medicine, at home and in the hospital, administered through it. He has not used the catheter in two days; the solution he injects to keep it open is in the refrigerator in the South End apartment he abandoned in such haste the previous day. The catheter has probably clotted off, he thinks.

He turns on the TV as he dresses. He flips past the local news stations, half expecting to see his mug flash on the screen, and stops at CNN. He presses the mute button as Miss Cheekbones

talks. He speaks for her: “An overgrowth of eyelashes is being described among persons infected with the AIDS virus who are on the anti-AIDS drug AZT.” Here she flashes her dimples, and Bobby continues. “Concern is being expressed by advocates that this will result in people being identified in their workplace as infected with the AIDS virus. . . .” He remembers his father watching boxing on television with the volume turned off, providing ringside commentary in his loud voice: “Muñoz, once again pounding the body, coming straight ahead, hooking to the ribs—Styles make fights, wouldn’t you say, Marv? You couldn’t find two more different fighters. Concinni hasn’t stopped moving, dodging, backpedaling, weaving—Oh! Concinni is tagged with a left! He’s in trouble! He’s down! Good night, sweet prince!”

He picks up the briefcase. It is burgundy and made of soft leather; it belonged to Michael. Michael moved into the apartment soon after Primo moved out. Michael did research on mice at the Genecor Research Center—mice with heart disease. He got sick and moved back to Iowa, leaving everything: his medicine, his furniture, his briefcase.

The bag has handles that slide out. In the outer, zippered pocket is Bobby’s birth certificate, his living will, his prescriptions, a yellow pad, and a pen. Inside the bag is the gun. And thick wads of hundred-dollar bills. He takes the gun out—Primo’s gun. In his hand it looks animate and repulsive. He regrets having it; he regrets having needed it. He walks around the room, looking for a place to hide it. He has a vision of a child discovering the gun, examining it, playing with it. Reluctantly, he puts it back in the briefcase.

He leaves the motel after a last look around. He takes a bus and gets off near MIT, near the hospital. A mist is rising off the river. He walks onto the bridge on Massachusetts Avenue. Halfway across, the muscles of his calves begin to hurt. These are not my muscles, he thinks as he reaches down to touch them. This is not my pain. He leans over the railing and looks down at the

water. A purple reflection of his face flashes at him, and he pulls away from the railing.

He starts walking again, watching his feet: one boot with silver chain, the other plain; left, right, left, right. This is the only way to do it, he thinks—something Primo never understood. He is angry when he thinks of Primo, and Michael. Primo gave up almost at once. Primo had made the move to Boston with Bobby, in search of better AIDS care, but had bolted from the clinic after the first visit, terrified by the sight of a cachectic young man in the waiting room. Primo's only fight—before he was hospitalized—was to take wild risks in his plane. He tried Dead Man's Stalls and Cuban Eights in the Cessna until they took away his license. Later, Bobby heard from others—because they had separated by then; the path Bobby had chosen to deal with the disease made Primo and his fatalism impossible to be around—that Primo began to cruise, spreading it, poisoning as many others as he could, as if it would ease his own pain. This had enraged Bobby so much that he did not attend Primo's funeral. Primo's mother called him afterward, screamed at him, accused him of killing her son. Michael gave up in a different way: he left one morning, saying that the magic of being in Waterloo, Iowa, eating his mama's cooking, going to the high-school ballgames, doing whatever one did in Waterloo, Iowa, would somehow save him. It didn't.

Meanwhile, Bobby had tried it all: AZT, then DDI, now DDC. And ganciclovir. And the underground Compound Q. And intravenous protein feeds. And aerosol pentamidine. He had meditated—he still did. He had gone macrobiotic until he could no longer swallow. "Oh, I may die," he shouts at a car that passes by, "but not without a goddamn fight!"

Near the Christian Science Building, Bobby jams one toe between the stones of the retaining wall and climbs up to reach some lilacs that hang from a bush. It is more effort than he thought it would be. He gets the flowers, but his shoulder hurts.

He hears the woman's voice before he sees her. "Those are pretty flowers. But you should leave them on the tree."

She wears a track suit and tennis shoes; her gray hair peeks out from under a scarf. A handkerchief is tightly wadded in her hand, and she is breathless. Bobby holds the flowers out to her; it freezes whatever else she was going to say, and she breaks into a shy smile. He drops slowly to one knee. He imagines he catches the scent of her perspiration, sees the steam rising off her body. "The official flower of our state, ma'am."

"You shouldn't have done that," she says, her hands reaching for one cluster, "but they are beautiful."

"Aren't you going to ask me what state?"

"Are you all right?"

He gets up and rubs his shoulder. It is on his tongue to say "the State of Immunodeficiency." Instead, he says, "No, I'm not all right."

Her smile melts into an expression of concern. She moves her feet, conscious that she has tarried too long already, but feels obliged to ask: "Can I do anything?"

"Are you a magician?" Bobby asks. "Never mind. No, you can't do anything. Thank you for stopping, though. Thank you."

She waves and walks away briskly, her elbows pumping high, her lockstep gait quickening; she turns when she nears the bridge, and smiles.

Bobby watches her till she is out of sight; he feels the anger return again. It comes in waves and crashes over him. Yesterday, rage at the mindless bills, the dunning letters, and—finally—the cutting off of his telephone and electricity had carried him downtown. He had seen his reflection as he tore into the Bank of Boylston—a whirling dervish in a black coat, with gun drawn. He almost shot at the reflection. Could a face really be that purple? He braced himself, expecting to be challenged at any moment. Instead, they pushed money bundles at him, even gave him a bag to stuff them in. When the bag was full, he shouted, "What now?"

What now?” but none of the prone figures would move. “What now?” he cried to the camera on the ceiling.

Too late he remembers that he could have given the woman some of the money.

He rests outside the hospital by the dry fountain that is full of butts and matchsticks. Then he starts walking again, against the flow of traffic as the eleven-to-seven nurses head for the parking lot. He bypasses the main entrance and goes into the tunnel and walks down it to the Kass Memorial Building and then takes the elevator to the fifth floor. He walks past patients’ rooms smelling of Lysol and bacon. In the nurses’ lounge the coffee is fresh, and he pours himself a cup, then snaps open drawer after drawer until he finds some sugar. He empties *six* packets into his cup.

Two people in white come in. One male, one female. One black, one white.

“Who are you?” one asks.

“Who are you?” he replies.

“We work here.”

“*We work here,*” Bobby says. Such complacency, such arrogance, he thinks. “And I am a walking skeleton. I’m a voodoo doll. I own this hospital.” They look confused. He explains: “I’m your three square meals a day.”

His hands are full now, what with the lilacs and the coffee and the briefcase. He moves toward the nurses and they step quickly aside.

Bobby goes down the stairs to the second floor and then through a long hallway, past dark labs and locked offices, until he reaches the clinic waiting room. Before the first sip of coffee is past his throat, before he can even sit down, he feels his intestines start to writhe, and he hurries for the men’s room.

Back in the waiting room, he takes one lilac stalk and leans over the counter, over the patient-register book, and wedges the stalk between the printer stand and the printer. Laurelei will keep it

there **all** day. She says that whenever she thinks of lilacs or smells them **she** thinks of him.

He tries breathing and meditation. He wants to feel the prana ebb and flow. *Ommmmmm*. His mind strays and he brings it back. *Ommmmmm*. But there is only anger. *Ommmmmm*. He thinks of his job as a short-order cook in Hoboken, ten years ago, while Primo was enrolled in a six-month course for his commercial license. It was fluid motion for Bobby—a moving line walked past him and they called the **tune** while **he** danced. He was the ballerina of Niko’s in Hoboken, cracking eggs, flipping hotcakes, buttering toast, sliding the dishes down the counter. Oronfrio, the manager, said he didn’t know why Bobby bothered with the men when he could have had any of the women. “Because I can have any of the men,” Bobby would say, flipping a morsel of scrambled egg into the air and catching it on his tongue, all the while looking into Oronfrio’s eyes. *Ommmmmm*. He thinks of his mother in Spartanburg and how she must shudder when she thinks of him with Primo. *That’s right, Mama. I was his blushing bride. He did to me more or less what Dad did to you.* She will be surprised when she gets the money he sent her. She will draw the shades and walk around the living room talking to herself, tormented by the knowledge of where the money came from and what she ought to do, and by her greed for the money and her wish to burrow in her house and deny his existence. He laughs aloud, and gives up the idea of meditation.

Three guys come in; two of them are a couple he knows from the waiting room. They run a bar in the South End. Bobby remembers buying some dope from one of them a year ago. The third one—the new one—is not quite with them. He signs in and sits **two** seats away from Bobby while the couple sign in. Bobby smells after-shave on the new guy, but beneath it is a sour, unwashed smell. It is the smell of fear, Bobby thinks; it irritates him. Laurelei arrives behind the desk and turns pale when she sees

Bobby. “Thanks,” she stammers when the dope dealer comments on the flowers. “Bobby brings them in,” she adds, and looks at Bobby fearfully. Bobby waves back and points at the rest of the flowers, which he has arranged in a soda can on the windowsill, but Laurelei runs into the inner office.

“The official AIDS flower,” Bobby says to the new guy, pointing to the lilacs. The new guy looks at the lilacs and then at the purple growths on Bobby’s face. “Get it?” Bobby asks, touching the biggest growth, over his right eyelid. “Lilacs out of the dead land. Get it?”

The new guy just blinks. The disease is not choosy, Bobby thinks; this kid is dumb as a coal bucket.

The new guy tries to ignore Bobby. He shakes out a cigarette with trembling fingers. There is a ring with a turquoise stone on his pinky, and his nails are long. They would be elegant in a different setting from the Metropolitan Hospital clinic. His brown hair is slicked back in a “wet look”—a style that Primo favored years before it became commonplace. Bobby moves over to sit next to him.

“You didn’t really have a bath, did you?” Bobby asks. “Your hair looks like you had a bath, but you didn’t. And you hurried with your breakfast—doughnuts on the way? How did I know? The powdered sugar on your mustache. I’m Bobby, by the way.” The new guy has the cigarette in one hand and a lighter in the other. “You can’t smoke here. You can shake my hand, though. You can’t get it by shaking my hand. Besides, you already got it.”

The new guy puts the lighter away and Bobby shakes his hand. The hand feels crumbly, fragile, but it is its sweatiness that primes Bobby, forces him to take more interest in this boy.

“You must be Clovis,” Bobby says. “I saw the register. ‘Clovis: Forty-five.’ Forty-five minutes is for new patients. Must be you. Let me guess. You tested positive—what, two years ago? And you were positive before that but didn’t want the test. And now you wake up in the night and you feel cold and you put on socks and wrap your head up, and then in an hour you drench

the sheets. And then you feel cold again. That’s why you didn’t shower, right? You were cold when it was time to have the shower. **Am I** right? You’re shit scared, am I right?”

Clovis tries to get up. “Sit down,” Bobby says to him. “You can’t afford not to listen to me. You need to listen to me. I’m a survivor—nine years. If you don’t want to live, just keep walking. That’s better. Let’s begin.” Bobby puts both his hands round Clovis’s forearm and twists the skin in opposite directions; Clovis yelps. “That’s called a barber’s twist, Clovis. Keep your eyes on the skin.” A shower of fine red dots makes a bracelet on Clovis’s forearm. “Oh, oh! You know what that means, don’t you? Your platelets are low. You’re farther along than you thought, Clovis. Good thing you came today.” Clovis’s face shrivels.

Clovis’s acquaintances are getting out. Clovis tries to rise again. His eyes plead with the couple, who are standing at the door, but Bobby takes the gun out of the briefcase and sets it on the chair. “Clovis is with me,” Bobby tells them. “And don’t roll your eyes at me, honey. You guys don’t look so hot yourselves. You got a way to make him live? I can make him live. What have you got?” The couple hurry out.

Bobby looks at Clovis; he wonders why he is bothering with this kid. Has Clovis become his hostage? In return for what? Bobby gets up and bolts the door. He paces around and then sits down. He has no doubt the police will be here soon. He takes one of Clovis’s cigarettes and lights it and hands it to Clovis. “You can smoke now, Clovis. Everything has changed.” He sits down and thinks awhile and then picks his words carefully.

“You don’t know how special I am, Clovis. I am a nine-year survivor. I’ve beaten the odds; I am way over the median survival. Look it up, if you want. I’m the only nine-year guy in this clinic. And it wasn’t luck either, Clovis. I fought for every fucking bit of it; I *scrapped* for it; I *took* all the responsibility.”

Clovis is listening; the fear and gloom that were on his face are momentarily erased.

“Level with me, Clovis. What is the scariest thing about this

whole business? That you can die from it? Death? Bang, bang? You probably will die from it, right?” Clovis’s eyes get big. “And that fear is what kept you from being tested? And that fear is still there — right?” Clovis’s eyes get even wider. Bobby takes out his yellow pad and pencil. He pats Clovis’s hand. “The only way to beat this is to lose your fear, Clovis,” he says kindly. “The fear doesn’t do you any good. In fact the fear can kill you before the disease does. It’s like most anything else in life: lose your fear and it can’t touch you.”

Bobby massages Clovis’s hand, trying to imagine what it is like to be a Clovis. What does a Clovis really feel? He sees a **LOSER, LOSER, LOSER** sign flash across Clovis’s face. Clovis is giving up, retreating again. Clovis is ugly, Bobby thinks. The dimples are really pimples, he has dandruff on his eyelashes, his face is oily. Clovis tries to withdraw his hand. Bobby considers stopping but feels obliged to continue; let the kid have the message, for what it’s worth.

“It’s not illegal to hold hands—is it, Clovis? Okay, I’m going to let go of your hand. I want you to answer a series of questions for me. I’ll write down your answers on paper, and then you put that paper in your pocket and carry it with you. Then — trust me — you will have conquered death. It worked for me. Okay? First of all, where do you want to die?”

Clovis’s chin is quivering. Bobby makes lines and draws columns on the paper. He is aware of the absolute silence in the building. “I’m asking you where you want to die. In the hospital? At home? On the street? You live with those guys, right? You all came in the same car, right? You work in the bar for them, right? A little dope, a little head—Hey, I know. So, you ready to die with them, in their apartment? In the South End? Or you want to die at your own house, in your mama’s arms? Or do you want to die with me?” Clovis begins to open his mouth, but no answer seems forthcoming. “With Mama,” Bobby whispers for him. He uses a southern accent. Childlike and *very* southern.

“With Mama? Let me guess — Alabama? Tennessee? Okay, you want to die with Mama? You need to write that down, Clovis. Get that down on paper. Otherwise they’ll dump you in Roxbury Cemetery. Okay, so you want to die at home. Now, what do you want them to do with your body?”

Clovis is weeping now, his face in his hands, and Bobby strokes the ducktail, his fingers coming away greasy. “It boils down to do you want to be cremated or buried?” Bobby busies himself writing on the yellow sheet. He is aware of the sirens approaching the parking lot outside, but he concentrates on the paper:

<b>BODY</b>	Home	x	Away	
<b>DISPOSAL</b>	Bury		Cremate	<b>x</b>
<b>SERVICE</b>	Yes	<b>x</b>	No	
<b>MUSIC</b>				
<b>TOMBSTONE</b>				

“I personally can’t stand the thought of waking up one day to find I’m locked in a pine box with rats nibbling at my eye sockets. If I was you I would go for cremation. It’s cheaper, easier for your family.”

Clovis is sniffing and carrying on. Bobby lets the *X* remain where it is. Cremation for Clovis.

“Music? I assume you want a service—so, music. See, that’s something you can control. Music: what do you want them to play? Come on, Clovis — music?”

“‘Rocky Top,’ Clovis? ‘Rocky Top you’ll always be, Home sweet home to me, Good old Rocky Top, Rocky Top, Tennessee.’” Singing the song makes Bobby laugh. He gets up and tries to clog but can’t move his feet quickly enough. “Good choice, Clovis! ‘Rocky Top’ it shall be.” He writes in “Rocky Top.” He lets go of the pad to hold Clovis’s hand again, because Clovis is trying to get away. Clovis sits down on the floor, his hand in Bobby’s grasp.

“The eulogy, Clovis! Don’t forget the eulogy. What do you

want them to say? Okay, okay, you can think about that. But the tombstone, the grave marker. That *has* to be your choice. ‘Clovis. Our beloved son—’”

Clovis breaks loose. He unbolts the door, pulls it open, and runs around the corner.

“Wait, Clovis! Put this paper in your pocket.”

Bobby picks up the *gun* but then tosses it out the window. He sits on the floor and carefully folds the paper into an airplane. His body is rocking back and forth with concentration. When he is done, he stands up and looks out the window. He is astonished by the crowd below. He sees Chatupadia and waves. He slowly pushes the window wide open and stands on a chair. With a flick of the wrist he sails the plane out. It is a wonderful plane—the best he has ever made. It catches an updraft and rises in a tight spiral. Bobby is drawn to the window: the yellow plane is still climbing. Bobby steps out on the sill and cranes his neck to follow it. Finally, when it can climb no more, it banks into a lazy left turn. He is aware of voices yelling at him, but they are drowned out by the roar of the plane’s engine. He imagines himself as the pilot. The plane finds another updraft. Bobby increases the power to full throttle and points the nose straight up. Gravity works against him, and he watches the airspeed indicator drop rapidly. Just before the plane shudders to a stop, he applies full rudder. He has timed it exactly, and his plane makes a perfect Hammerhead turn, rotating on the tip of one wing. Now he points the nose at the crowd below. He sees his airspeed rise again. The wings shudder and the wind whips at his face. He puts his finger on the fire button. “Coming at you!” he shouts.