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*** denotes Manuscript Award Winners**

The Manuscript Society

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Matt Himlin
"but does not can"

Drama

Marcie Herman
"Have"

Essay

Diana Davis
"It's a Bird, It's a Plane,
No It's. . .My Grandma?"

but does not can

alone and no one there to see
the actions of the lonely man
that lives though choosing not to be
and changing wants but does not can
must ever walk the lone path slow
debate the use of living
while all it seems to heaven should go
by God's hands drawn forgiving
but knows a hefty price be paid
as he's been always told
the soul is light but can't be weighed
in precious stone nor gold
so ever walks the lonely man
mutters prayers to fondest death
though able God but does not can
to grant him end to weary breath

- Matt Himlin
WINNER POETRY



Seventy Cent Portrait
- Chris Sleboda

My Friend

Forward, though
the tortured spirit
of your existence
backward goes, --
I've seen you falter,
and move towards me
with blood stained eyes, --

to darkness creeping
here from yore
you sought the
marvels of some
fellow's thoughts but
now no time seeks
your shrinking words.

Go, now! through the
lantern light,
the bough
of your fledgling
cries, your fledgling
cries, your scared
likeness, and die --
in darkness creeping.

Or
my friend,
in darkness
weeping for your
blood-stained eyes!

- Joseph Cortegerone

Love from A Prison

'Tis the hour for poetry.
Might I burden unto my Becky:
For me, or not for me?
-This is my pain.

Many sleepless nights -- how I wish
To hold thee; to taste your scent,
And inhale it deep into my heart; or
Press my breath to your ear,
And have your sweet smile never depart.

How my lips burn to rub themselves
Down your flawless neck;
And for you every other pretty face would
My heart reject.

- Richard Ali



Untitled Sketch
- Molly Baines

All Caught Up

I found myself one day after all the casualties of life caught up with me, hanging from a tree. Upside down with a tail that if I recall, does not fashion part of the human anatomy. I couldn't deny it, of course, there I was in a tree I recognized to be one in my very own backyard. What would the neighbors think?

"Hey," I tried to yell, but my voice came out like an animal's cry in distress. I'd best be quiet and figure some way down from there. Cautiously, I jumped from limb to limb, finding it less difficult than I thought since my toes were about two inches longer than usual. I needed a shave, too.

On solid ground, I walked to the front of my house where Mr. Biggins was watering his chrysanthemums next door. I tried to sneak into my house without him noticing me, but I suppose whatever kind of beast I'd turned into was not a usual spectacle in the suburbs.

"Dolly, come quick, there's a gorilla running around out here!"

"That's nice, dear," I heard her yell from inside. They were an elderly couple and Mr. Biggins had a reputation for sometimes forgetting to wear pants.

"Call the dog-catcher or something. This thing might have rabies!"

"Anything you say, dear."

I tried opening the door, but I seemed to have lost my keys somewhere in between my house and the tree I had been swinging from.

"What's the matter, fella? You locked out?" Mr. Biggins said to me. I tried to answer him, but again my words came out in a primal scream.

"Whoa, no reason to be upset. We'll just call the locksmith. Dolly," he called inside, "this gorilla's locked out, call the locksmith."

"Right away, George."

I sure was lucky to have Mr. Biggins for a neighbor. I walked over to him as nonchalantly as a gorilla, or whatever I was, could do in the quiet streets of suburbia. He held his hand out to me and took me inside.

"Dolly, come meet our new neighbor!" he yelled.

"Hi, I'm. . ." she trailed off into a shriek of fear and amazement at the sight her husband brought home.

"What did you say your name was again?" Mr. Biggins said to me.

"That's a. . .a. . ." Mrs. Biggins stammered.

"Well, whatever it is, it seems friendly enough and he lives next door now so let's try to show him a little hospitality."

"I'm calling the zoo," she said and disappeared into the kitchen.

In the midst of all this I was picking insects from my fur. I definitely needed a shave.

"Now, I don't want to be rude, sir, but I wouldn't come into your home and spread lice on your carpet," Mr. Biggins said.

I grunted what I meant to be an apology. I was being rude. I also felt a little hungry. I knew an attempt to explain this would only cause more trouble than I was already in, what with the zoo on the way, so I grabbed a few mints from the candy dish on the coffee table and popped them in my mouth.

"Help yourself, that's what they're there for. Less for me to eat. The Mrs. thinks I need to watch my weight," he patted his jolly stomach and laughed at the proud bulge hanging over his plaid golf pants. He was actually wearing them, it must have been one of his better days.

"The zoo people are on their way," Mrs. Biggins reappeared from the kitchen. "What should we do with him in the meantime?"

"You play cards?" Mr. Biggins asked me. "I'll shuffle."

"I don't think he knows how to play cards, dear," Mrs. Biggins said.

"Okay, Yatzee, then. How 'bout it?"

"Let's not make the attempt."

"I'm only trying to make friends, Dolly. Watch me, you might learn something."

"Fine, you entertain the thing. I'm going out to the market." She walked out the door in a huff and left us alone together. The monkey-man and the elderly senile.

I wondered then why I never really associated more with Mr. Biggins. Perhaps because I'd already seen him in his boxer shorts.

"How 'bout a burrito?" He had a wild look in his eyes as though we were about to storm the jungle for Mexican food. "The Mrs. doesn't like me eating them, but I sneak one when she's not around."

I tried my best to concur, and again shrieked at the old man.

"I'll take that as a yes," he said and we went into the kitchen on a manhunt for a burrito.

Their house smelled like old people, a mix of bland potato soup and flowery perfume. Mr. Biggins dug in the back of his freezer for the forbidden taco.

"Found 'em!" He held them up with pride as if he'd just caught the brass ring.

He popped the burritos in the microwave and set the timer. At least he wasn't too out of his wits to do that.

"You know, I didn't even know that young man next door was moving. No "For Sale" sign or anything. But I hope you don't play your music as loud as he did."

It's interesting, the things people will say to you when they don't think you're actually you.

"He kept to himself, though. The Mrs. and I had him mow our lawn once a week in the summer, but he always missed around the edges. I nearly broke my back trying to clip what he left behind."

I felt a little bad about that, but also thought he should appreciate the fact that I mowed his lawn for free.

"Oh, the burritos are done!"

I never saw an old man move so fast in my life. He jumped out of his chair like it bit him in the ass and ran over to the microwave, got two plates and served us both a snack. He sat down and drooled over his burrito, letting it cool, as a grizzly bear over its salmon. I thought I was supposed to be the wild beast at the table.

The doorbell rang just as Mr. Biggins was about to sink his teeth into his prey. I knew it was the zoo. What timing. My last chance for some real American junk food, and I'm going to be hauled

off to a cage for the rest of my animal life (hopefully I was going to turn human again one of these days), and I don't even get a burrito. What the hell was I anyway? I didn't ask for this.

He disappeared to answer the door and came back about a minute later.

"Damn Girl Scouts. Trying to get me to buy their cookies. Don't they see I'm old and my stomach can't handle that kind of stuff. Oh," he said. "This burrito hits the spot."

We munched on our forbidden fruit and I wondered how that scene must look if someone was to walk in on us right then. But why ruin the moment?

The burrito tasted just the same as it did when I was human which made me wonder if all animals, human and otherwise, have the same taste for food then why do we feed our pets such crap? They must resent us for that. All this time I thought Otis was just picky and stand-offish, but my cat secretly loathed me for forcing him to eat processed horse liver and shark fins. I wondered if he'd like Mexican.

Mr. Biggins was proudly belching and patting his gut next to me. Then he did the most amazing thing I'd ever seen from any one who hadn't spent a majority of their adolescence in a cave. I knew a few people like that, but I was pretty sure Mr. Biggins was used to modern day propriety. Just as I was about to take another bite of my burrito, he jumped across the table, snatched it from my hands and gobbled the rest of it down in one swallow.

"I'm sorry, were you going to eat that?" He looked at me innocently as if he did this sort of thing a lot.

The doorbell rang again, and I think I let out a sigh of relief this time. Mr. Biggins got up, struggling slightly, and went to answer the door. I peeked around the wall separating the kitchen from the living room to see who it was.

Four men in overalls with a large net and a tranquilizer gun stood on the front steps.

So this is how my life was going to turn out. My aspirations of becoming a certified public accountant were looking pretty bleak just then.

Anyway, who would hire a gorilla to do their taxes?
On purpose, I mean.

"Okay, we can do this quietly, or we can do
this the fun way," the biggest zoo keeper in the mid-
dle smiled demonically at Mr. Biggins.

"What are you talking about?" Mr. Biggins
asked, confused. Frankly, I was too.

"Let's go, old man," the zoo keeper grabbed
him while the other three menacing figures threw
the net over him. Mr. Biggins didn't even fuss. He
was probably waiting for something like this to hap-
pen, and maybe even welcomed it. I spied from
the kitchen window as they shoved him into the
back of the truck. One of the men threw him a
deck of cards.

I walked out to the front steps and watched
Mr. Biggins being carted off to the zoo. The driver
beeped his horn and waved at me as he pulled
away. I remembered I was locked out of my house,
so I went back to the tree I'd found myself hanging
from when all of the casualties of life caught up with
me in hopes I'd once again become human.

- Colleen McKinnon

Untitled

The rusted fence cages the dead

The rows of gray stones seem endless

The stones bare its owner's names and designates that piece of and for their
eternal rest

Some lay content and quiet
while others become rambunctious and rise from
their grave

They walk aimlessly
but can not wander beyond the steel bars

They are trapped in the past
prisoners in the Land of the Dead

- Jim Hiuish



YA-WE-VIR-D
- Chris Sleboda

Have

Two long-time friends are on the phone in their respective dorm rooms. One is Ange, the other is Pat. The soundtrack to Conan the Barbarian is playing on Pat's stereo. His room is dimly lit. Ange's room is dark. It is just after sunset -- and not quite dark in her room. Silhouettes clearly show her form and those of the objects in her room. Pat sits on a chair at his desk. He flips through a textbook.

Pat: You know what men want, Ange? A ménage.

Ange: *(She cocks her head.)* Oh, really?

Pat: Yeah. All men want the ménage.

Ange: Does Paula know you want that?

Pat: Hmm. *(He pauses a moment.)* I don't think so, but I noticed her fine roommate when I picked her up for our date the other night.

Ange: All men want the ménage, but I have one question, Pat. *(Pause.)* Can all men handle the ménage?

(Another pause.)

Pat: No. Only a select few can. Shattner could handle it.

Ange: Sure. He's Captain Kirk.

Pat: Right. And I think there's one other man that can handle the ménage.

Ange: Who's that? *(She picks up a stuffed animal.)*

Pat: The Odin of World Cultures as we know it. *(He starts to mess with a pen. He waits for her to answer. She doesn't.)*
Fred Martino.

Ange: Mr. Martino? "The Mighty Martino?" College football and history hero extraordinaire? He was our eleventh grade history teacher! *(She swings her legs over the side of the bed. She puts the animal down.)*

Pat: Yes. I know. But, haven't you always wondered why he and his wife don't have kids? It would ruin all of their fun.

Ange starts to pull on her ear while she thinks about it. Then, she starts to nod her head in the affirmative.)

Ange: That might explain why they had that Swiss girl as a foreign exchange student the year we had him. . .

Pat: Exactly. It was a ménage.

Ange: *(She nods her head back and forth.)* Oh, man.

Pat: That is why those two gods among men are my idols.

Ange: *(She pauses and begins to lean forward, just slightly seductively on the bed.)*
But you couldn't handle it, Pat? I think you could.

Pat: Oh, definitely not. I can only aspire to that ideal situation. No, when women outnumber me when I'm naked and vulnerable, I get scared. I always think they're going to talk about me. You know, the important parts of me.

Ange: Oh, like your love of capitalism, your knowledge of Imperial Russia. I'm sure it happens to you a lot.

Pat: Funny, Ange. Funny.

(He gets up and changes the CD in his stereo.)

Ange: So, the ménage is just a dream you have?

(Teddy Pendergrass' "Close the Door" begins to play.)

Pat: Yeah, unless you're interested. Paula and I can be to your dorm within the hour.

Ange: *(She pauses. She sits cross-legged on the bed.)* Maybe this weekend.

Pat: *(He stops in his trek to his bed.)* How's Saturday?

Ange: I'll have to ask Dave.

Pat: That's okay.

Ange: *(She pauses.)* I was joking.

Pat: *(He pauses.)* Oh. *(He continues to his bed and sits.)*

Ange: I think you need to rent some porn there, Pat. It sounds like it by the music you've got on -- is that Teddy Pendergrass?

Pat: You know it. *(He moves his body a bit to the rhythm.)*

Ange: *(Flirting.)* You need some porn, or you need to get laid.

Pat: I do need some porn. *(He hits the bed with his downstage fist.)* Too bad I loaned out my entire collection.

Ange: How many volumes is it now?

Pat: *(He grimaces a bit.)* Three.

Ange: Isn't that what it was last year?

Pat: Yes.

Ange: *(Shocked/joking.)* You didn't find *Caligula* yet?

Pat: No, unfortunately. Did you see it?

Ange: *(Appalled.)* No. *(Her body cringes.)*

Pat: I'll find it. We'll watch it.

Ange: Um, from what you've told me about that movie, you just take your time -- there's no rush. Where are all of your tapes you loaned out?

Pat: Mike, my roommate from last year has one and my boss has the other two. I don't know why he wanted two. He's a big, bad black man that's got chicks falling all over him every minute of the day. Lucky bastard. *(He starts flipping through a novel that was on his bed.)*

Ange: Yeah, you'd think a big, beautiful black man would be doing fine without porno movies.

Pat: *(Resignedly.)* I know. I know.

Ange: You didn't have any guys-on-guys porn, did you, that he may have wanted to borrow?

Pat: *(He's shocked.)* How dare you? *(Throws down the book. He starts walking around the room.)* The only gay porn star on those tapes is Peter North, and he's makin' it with girls -- ONLY.

Ange: Okay. Just checking. *(She begins to walk around the room.)*

Pat: That's, that's sick. What kind of freak do you think I am?

Ange: I don't know. I was just curious. *(Pause.)* I need you to explain something to me. Will you?

Pat: I guess so. *(He sits back down on his bed.)*

Ange: Now, I don't really think the idea of two men doing it is especially gratifying, but two girls is kind of cool.

(Ange turns on the overhead light in her room. It's very bright in her room now. She then goes to her bed and lies down on her back.)

Pat: *(He sits up straight.)* Are you sure you're busy this Saturday? Does Davey-boy know?

Ange: Come on. Be serious. What I want to know is. . .haven't you ever wondered what it would be like to just kiss a guy?

Pat: *(Adamantly.)* No. I have not.

Ange: Really? You've never talked with your guy friends about what it might be like?

Pat: Absolutely not.

Ange: *(She sounds skeptical.)* Never wondered what it would be like to be gay?

Pat: Never. But you apparently have thought fondly of a little lesbo-action.

Ange: *(Frankly.)* Yes, I have.

Pat: Do your friends know? Does your roommate?

Ange: *(Confused.)* Huh? *(She props herself up on her downstage elbow.)*

Pat: You'll have to break it easy to Dave. He's gonna be hurting in more ways than one when he finds out you're leaving him for another woman.

(Silence. At least a minute of it. A look of "How dare you?" comes on to Ange's face.)

Are you there, Ange? I was kidding, you know that, right? Ange?

Ange: *(She puts her hand to her head.)* What?

Pat: I'm sorry. I was mean.

Ange: You were. *(She seems okay now. She lies back down.)*

Pat: So, you're a little bi-curious. That's alright. What brought all this about, though?

Ange: Well, from what I can figure out, it's today's society.

Pat: In what way?

Ange: Society has been telling all of us that women are sexy. Women ARE sex. And I think both sexes, to an extent, learn to desire women sexually. *(A small pause.)* Well, it makes sense to me.

Pat: Uh-huh. So, it's okay, according to society, for women to want men and/or women?

Ange: *(Matter-of-fact.)* Basically. Think about it. It's easy for me to say another girl is pretty, but it's hard for a guy to say another guy is handsome. For you, there's only one option. I've got two, plus guys get excited when I say I've at least contemplated both of those options.

Pat: You're right. Women seem to have more sexual freedom than men in that respect.

Ange: Yeah, but it's only one aspect, Pat.

Pat: I know, and I think I'm jealous of you.

Ange: *(Sitting up.)* Jealous?

Pat: Yeah. *(He gets up and shuts off his stereo. He puts the TV on mute.)*

Ange: So, you have entertained the thought of some guy-on-guy action yourself! *(She goes to her stereo and puts in a tape. She turns the light off and flips on the light by her bed--one notch.)*

Pat: Yeah, alright, maybe ONCE. You tell, and I murder you. Understand?

Ange: *(She smiles.)* Your secret's safe with me. I swear.

(“Every Breath You Take” by the Police is playing on Ange’s stereo.)

Pat: Alright. Now I've got a question.

Ange: Okay. Shoot.

Pat: How much jealousy is too much in a relationship?

Ange: *(She thinks about it.)* Man, I don't know.

Pat: 'Cause Paula's been pretty clingy lately.

Ange: Well, she didn't get to see you much this summer. *(She suddenly looks sad,*

solemn. *She slumps/slides off of her bed onto the floor.*) She probably just missed you.

Pat: Maybe, but she gets so uptight about any girl I talk to.

Ange: *(She pauses.)* I can't blame her. You're a great guy, Pat. *(She sits cross-legged on the floor.)*

Pat: Well, thank you, but you are the only girl she trusts me with other than her, and she's starting to doubt you, too.

Ange: *(Her eyebrows raise.)* Did you tell her about us?

Pat: Yeah. It came up. But I told her it was a long time ago, and that we're like siblings now.

Ange: *(Pause.)* Oh. *(Pause.)* That's right. Like brother and sister. *(She picks up a magazine, halfheartedly.)*

Pat: Exactly. It's like she doesn't trust me, or something.

Ange: Hmm. Well, I'd say too much jealousy is a stalker.

Pat: *(Brief pause.)* It's funny you should mention that. . .

Ange: *(Protective.)* Paula's stalking you? Get outta there, Pat!

Pat: No, no, no, no, no. Another girl's stalking me. She calls me from her job. She's working at 2 a.m. and she calls me and says, "Hi, Pookie. Can we talk?" sounding like Mike Meyers on "Coffee Talk."

Ange: *(Her brow wrinkles as she goes back to the magazine.)* Pookie? Where did she get that one? Who is this chick?

Pat: *(Pause.)* Her name is Dawn.

Ange: Do you have class with her, or something?

Pat: No.

Ange: Well, then how do you know her? *(She turns the volume down on the stereo with the remote control that's on the floor.)*

Pat: *(He hesitates, and shifts his position.)* You can't tell Paula, okay?

Ange: Okay. . .

Pat: Dawn's the girl I cheated on Paula with.

(Big silence.)

Ange: Oh. *(Pause.)* Does Paula know?

Pat: I'm not sure. I thought she might since she was all jealous lately, but I don't know.

Ange: That could be it. So, I guess you don't plan on telling Paula, do you?

Pat: *(Surprised/taken aback.)* No.

Ange: Why not?

Pat: Because I made a mistake. I was warned that Dawn was a psycho-stalker, and that I shouldn't get involved, but I didn't listen. *(Beat. Just enough time for Pat to run his hand through his hair.)* I didn't think that Paula needed to know. *(Pause.)* You probably think I'm a jerk, now, don't you?

Ange: *(She crosses her legs in front of her -- stretched out.)* I don't know. *(Pause.)* No. . . I don't think you're a jerk. You just got confused, curious even. And you made a mistake. Do you feel guilty about it?

Pat: No. That's why I didn't tell Paula.
(Awkward pause. Ange plays with the carpet on her floor, thinking.)
You still there, Ange?

Ange: *(She looks a little scared.)* Did you cheat on me when we were dating?

Pat: Not once. Not even a thought of it. I swear.

(Ange's tape player "chunks" off. The end of her tape. Both give a small sigh of relief. She goes and flips the tape with a smile.)

(Sarah McLachlan's "Possession" starts playing.)

(Pat moves to the TV and turns the volume up. It's The Kids in the Hall.)

Pat: Oh, Ange! Do you know what's on?!

Ange: *(She listens as she looks at a photo on her nightstand.)* It sounds like Scott Thompson of *The Kids in the Hall*.

Pat: Yeah! It's that one when Bruce McCulloch is Hitler. . .

Ange: And he's doing it with that kid's pet donkey?

Pat: That would be the one.

Ange: Man, they are one messed up bunch of Canadians.

Pat: You know it.

Ange: What channel are they on?

Pat: Comedy Central.

Ange: Okay. I gotta go. My phone bill's gonna be huge.

Pat: Yeah, uh, okay. Tell Dave I said hi.

Ange: I will. Call you next weekend?

Pat: I'll call you. See ya.

Ange: 'Bye. *(They both hang up.)*

- Marcie Herman
WINNER DRAMA

Women (Rule the World with a Silent flick of their Hair)

Women are wonderful. In all the containers which hold them.
One smile could fill you with pride
And make you happier than any male may.
Their smell, makes all men 'hale twice.

Women have no power, and all the power.
One laugh provides confidence enough to fight
Yet one snicker provides reason for death.
The ever so subtle bounce to a breast,
Or the slight exposure of a leg only increases their power.

Consciously or unconsciously women rule the world,
And I am more than willing to follow.

Women raise us and repair us and when there is more than two
Of us together we rob them of their worth and demean them.

Women rule the World with a silent flick of their hair

- Reily



any of the felted mallets that strike
against the strings of a piano.
the malleus, one of the bones of the
middle ear.

She Hit Him with a _____

- Chris Sleboda



Still Suit Swing Saturday
-Chris Sleboda

Good Friday

I walked into that bar like a drowned man on my feet, feet dragging, eyes empty, shoulders sagging, hands limp. I stumbled into that bar the way a man falls into a dentist's, unsure of what exact tortures await him, muscles tense, head bowed, face blank. I walked into that bar with a belly full of beer, a mouthful of smoke and a head full of hormones. I walked into that bar flanked by my friends and once I got inside its smoke-soaked belly, I found myself lost in a whirlpool of sex and smoke and beer and rock n' roll. Funny the way life works.

Took me twenty years to meet sex in the flesh. Took me twenty years of pre and post-adolescent torture to finally realize one of the naked truths of life. Took me a lot of time and in a way that was all worth it.

I drunkenly fumbled my wallet out of my back pocket and presented my driver's license to the wide-shouldered man at the door. He handed it back to me with an "Okay" that reeked of bad beer and I managed somehow in my inebriated condition to give him a twenty to which he replied with ten, twenty singles. I looked to my left and my high school buddy Scott "Scoot" Jones had already been swept up into the carnival of the carnal that was occurring behind my back. I looked at him for a moment and then looked towards where his eyes lingered. I think that's when the tumblers of the universe started clicking into place, one after the other in their own methodic, municipale time.

My jaw slackened and my mouth went Cotton Mather dry and everything just seemed to spin around me like some mad carousel. Pete said something, but it was lost in the din in my head. Next thing I knew I was following Pete past the throngs of horny college students and unhappily married men to a spot at the bench that sat behind the seats at the base of the stage. I dropped down onto that hard bench a fluid sac of alcohol, nicotine and twenty years of Catholic Italian longings and a smile grew on my lips. It was the kind of smile that comes to me every now and then, the kind of smile I get when I'm warm with beer and smoke and life is good and the air is strong and the wind is westernly. I smiled and I had to choke back a laugh.

Occasionally God smiles on me, but on that night he was kissing my feet.

I can't really remember who was on stage when I first sat down. I was lost in dull shock and amusement. I can remember however, that she was sexy and naked and seductive and most of the blood that was in my head started a slow descent to my groin. I looked at Gregg who sat to my right and with a manic smile said, "We're coming back next week!" He nodded in agreement but kept his attention on the incarnation of female sexuality that prowled her way up and down the stage.

I must have been there a good fifteen minutes when that first girl came up to me. Though, looking back at that night, I find it punctuated with points of periodic amnesia, I can smell her as clearly as I can see my hands working the keys on my word processor. I can smell her as easily as I can smell the brimstone and nicotine on my lips.

She rose up before me like some celestial succubus and looked me square in the eyes. Another tumbler fell into place as I stared up from my seat on that coarse, rough blue bench into her soft, easy, liquid blue eyes. She had a crooked grin and a Roman nose and hair that curled down her back and shoulders in golden, supple waves. I sat there, my shaking arms folded nervously across my bony chest and my booze streaked eyes danced up and down her barely clad form. Her alabaster hand slid up from her hip and brushed against my cheek and chin, through my hair. She stepped between my legs and her hips narrowly brushed my thighs. What little fluid there was in my mouth evaporated like a small poolside puddle on a hot summer day. I clenched my hands into nervous fists as she slid along the insides of my legs and swung her chest low in my face. My toes did a spastic dance in my sneakers and I seemed to be floating three feet from the floor. She spun against me, her flaxen hair whipping across my face just slow enough for me to get a good draught of her through my nose, and then she was on me, working herself against me in slow lazy circles, and rough, smooth thrusts. My head bounced back against the bar behind me and inaudible,

unintelligible sounds started to pour from my mouth like water from some carnal Persian spring. Pete looked at me, smirked and burst into a loud braying laugh. I tried my best to smile, to gain some sort of composure, but as she pressed against me my mind was lurching from track to track like some spectral, driverless locomotive.

Then she stopped. She stopped and my drunken, lecherous mind came back to me in some little way. Her knee rose up before me, smooth and white, and I bit back the need to run my callused, skeletal hands over it. Somehow I managed to fish a single out of my shirt's breast pocket with near quivering fingers and placed it under her garter. She leaned in and whispered a thank you in my ear and then gently kissed me on the cheek. My ego liquefied on contact. All that was left was id. The synchronicities were in line, all the tumblers had fallen.

She moved onto the patiently and eagerly awaiting Pete, leaving me a shaken, broken wreck of a man. My feet splayed out before me, I slid down the bench, exhaling. "I need a beer," I croaked in a savaged voice, "I need a beer bad!" I pulled out my cigarettes with a twitching hand and stuffed one between my lips. Gregg was kind enough to light it for me and nicotine rushed through my already flooded blood stream.

It was a religious experience, what she had done to me. I could feel my mind shrugging off the old locks and chains and manacles I had placed on it the way one would cast off an old, heavy coat in summer weather. I coughed in that smoke filled air and my eyes closed. I took a deep hit of air through my nose and I could still smell her. I can still smell her.

It wouldn't be far from the truth to say I fell in love with that girl. She'd done things to me with looks and gentle movements that I'd only dreamed about. My heart was an open book that night and I let every one of those girls in it as they stalked around that stage and my lap, their eyes glittering, their hips and breasts etching themselves in my mind, supple round curves and bends that begged to be traced with shaky fingers and nervous hands.

I could go on for hours about them,

spending page after page describing each one of them, the way their skin glowed, the way their hips cut through the air, the swell of their breasts, the very smell of them. That'd be pointless though. Though they were all beautiful and unique to me they were merely simply facets of a larger gem, faces of the great goddess. Rama Kushna hid behind all of them, dressed in their flesh and their smiles and their sex. She was there that night, floating angel-like through that perfumed air, lending smiles, gentle caresses. Rama Kushna, all hips and breasts and loud, round curves. She woke me up that night. With a kiss on the cheek pulled me head first from the womb of malcontention and latent melancholy.

I can still feel her, the softness of her ample breast on my cheeks and chin, the weight of her against my swollen groin, the taste of her hair in my face, the smell of her sex. She was in all of them, Rama Kushna was, but she was most in that first one, the one who with a simple bent smile and a strong back caused every last reservation to flee my mouth with groans of joy and low moans of pleasure.

I left that place drunk and happy and unable to control my reeling mind.

I've been back there once so far. It took my liquid mind quite some time to coagulate, but being a glutton for punishment, I picked my mental scabs and let my mind bleed out of me again. This time I went sober, and she was there again, Rama Kushna. She had not been an illusion, a ghost created by a mind filled to the brim with booze. She was real, tangible, hidden in all that soft flesh, all that sex. She was there again too, that first girl, and she made me melt again, made me turn into a pile of goo with a solid erection.

I can't eat much anymore. Food gets near my mouth and I think about her. I sit around and listen to music and its about her. I lay in bed and my mind wanders to her. She's like some welcome demon, a succubus who won't leave me alone. She's heaven and hell rolled up into one package.

It's funny, looking back, what that place did to me. It's funny, but in a way, it's sad. It stripped me of all I had known and opened me up to

something I had always longed for. Funny part is, now it's all I can think about, all I can taste, all I can smell. I'm stuck in a purgatory of sorts, let loose from the hot confines of a long-known and lived-in hell to be stuck halfway on the road to heaven.

Funny the way life works. Twenty years to see real unblemished sex, twenty years. Twenty years to really get a grip on the reality of female sexuality. Twenty years for all those tumblers to fall in place.

Funny. . .
Shame I still can't get laid.

- Bernie Kovacs

VII.

This ambiguous death
is surfacing without any
pre-supposition

Fuck you!
that's right, you--!
stupid little girl. . .
teen angst_ha. . .
middle America.

- Joseph Cortegerone

Poem # 74

Day after day
sitting in the same small stall
looking at the bare blue wall
I scribbled what enclosed me
in an even smaller place,
"I was raped."
A black pen marred the bathroom wall.

I felt a release,
a pressure lifted when I scribbled
my secret,
Silently but in a not so quiet way
I yelled "I was raped."

Not once considering what my confession would bring
I found myself
sitting in the same small stall
staring at the less bare but ever so blue wall.
I saw the words "I was raped, too"
written on a slant in pencil.

As the days wore on,
the women's restroom wall became
marred with pen, and marker, and eyeliner pencil
all retorting in one fashion or another
"I was raped, too."

I am not alone
Capsuled, caged, confined,
but freed by my silent confession.

Later in the semester,
the same small stall
had a new, bare, blue wall.
Clean and untarnished and blank.
Empty of the cries from woman.

- Sarah E. Karlavage



Untitled Painting
- Molly Baines

The Keepers of GET

Freedom is lovely and so is the sky
but not when its price is too high
to be paid by the people who pay off the debts
to those sinner/collectors the Keepers of GET

that laugh at the masses who can't afford to cry
and they dance and they sing and they own the sky
and freedom's price is by them paid
when they fake-feel sorry for the soldiers laid
in early graves to pay off the debt
kept by those sinners the Keepers of GET

who dance in the gardens beneath the sky they own
in their skyscraper castles with foundations of bone
of workers and makers who toil and sweat
'neath the firey sun of the Keepers of GET

who laugh at the thought of going to hell
'cause they've paid off all the angels who fell
so ever they'll dance and continue to sing
and lie through their teeth and collect each thing
that is made by the makers and used by the few
who are privileged enough to dance as they do
with the Ranks of the Wretched, the most vile yet
those sinner/collectors the Keepers of GET

- Matt Himlin

Poppies Pollination

Parturition commences intertwined with
that rankling neuralgia forever tormenting
the bounds of cranial equilibration.

My grandmother has headaches, and gave birth to my mother
and them. My mother has headaches, and gave
birth to them and me. And though aware of this,
seeing those stars always there,
I bred that handiwork; pullulation with pain.

Forever contrite for what was passed on.
Seeing the raw and tender print shouldering intolerable
burdens, martyring meanings just to assuage their temples,
ever insightful of chisel marks left chafing their essence.

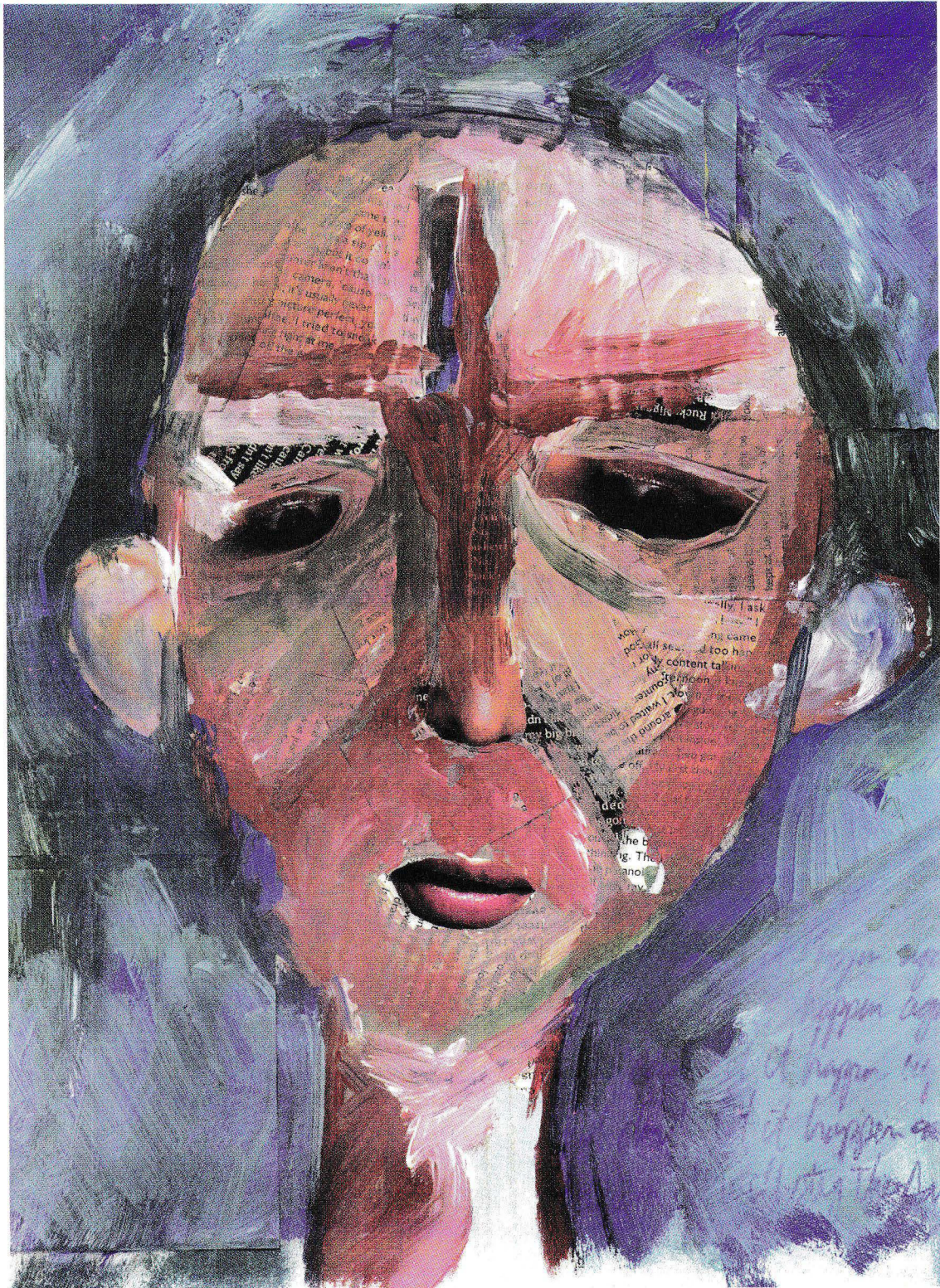
But my grandmother has headaches and my mother
has headaches and I have headaches that
clamp a vice to near pulpy viscosity.
Let the cruciation seep out slowly, minutely.
And if words transcend headaches to you,
I am sorry, certain elements
must be bequeathed for subsistence sake.

- Sean Flannery

Kid's Play

Across my backyard into a forest lying,
Cemetery, dreary, damp, cold, field of dying.
Rustle of leaves spook the woodlands,
Strange sounds all around, array.
Old, Old Timer blows his winter breath over timeless hands.
Flashlights dance with the darkness of kid's play.
Kid's style hide and seek
A place to lay on a slab of concrete.
Creeping the creep, careful not to fall and bust a head,
Heart racing, hands shaking, on the bed.
Trying to lie as still as the full moon.
Screaming through the fog, be aware, they are lurking before you.
Crawl back inside your mama's womb.
You scaredy cat you.

- Mauranita Miller



Brilliant Blue Tuesday
- Chris Sleboda



Nectar like Fuel
- Chris Sleboda

Lost

Lost on the streets of a different town, in a
different place.
Not knowing which street to take next.
All in a minute your heart pounding, tremendous
nervousness overcomes you, as you change the tape,
smoke your cigarette, shift, gas, steer, and watch
the road all at the same time.
You would not be lost if it were your home town.
One wrong turn and forget about it.
You can't find your way.
Lost like a house pet in the woods.
Left, right, straight, shift, stop, red light, am
I in first gear?
Fear in motion, no direction, because someone gave
you the wrong directions or you weren't listening.
I think it's this way or maybe that way.
Ask the three year old she'll tell you which way to go.
Once in a while she knows better than I.
Why?
That's her guess too,
But, no I was supposed to turn left, instead of
right.
Driving down streets, up and down, turning here.
The right street, but FOURTH on the end.
Stopping for directions is no help.
Most people who live in the town don't have a clue of
what street goes where or how to get to the street I'm
looking for.

- Mauranita Miller

Just Desserts

I just drank a pot of coffee. I can't shake this nervous feeling and I think it might have something to do with the fact that I just drank a pot of coffee. Either that or it's my dead husband lying on the floor next to me. A combination of both, maybe.

Some might say I killed him, but I don't see it that way. If stabbing him 37 times with a butter knife could be considered murder, then, yeah, I killed him. But I don't see it that way because a butter knife isn't really a weapon. It was still caked with the mayonnaise I spread on his ham and cheese sandwich.

He ate meat. I *hated* that about him. So, I guess I did those poor farm animals a favor. No worms, little piggies, I have delivered you from his damnable carnivorous tendencies. This nervous feeling has subsided a bit.

I watched him tear into the grizzle and chew on bacon fat like it was Bubblicious. Sometimes he'd still be chewing hours after we'd finished our dinner. He'd dig out a piece of pork that stuck in his teeth, not spit it out, but chomp on it and savor it like that last M&M in the corner of the bag that you don't think was there.

"Mmmm, Honey, I found a piece of bacon," he would open his mouth and show it to me.

"You had chicken for dinner." He was always doing that.

I'm starting to think that maybe I should have confronted him, that I acted a bit haphazardly. I could have given him fair warning, a chance to defend himself. Though the look on his face when I charged at him was satisfying. I thought of the cows as they are sliced into, and hung from those big metal hooks, blood and intestines spilling out onto the floor. His eyes were helpless, frightened, pleasantly mortified. That look faded after I stabbed him about 12 times, then they became cloudy and dull. I didn't like the empty stare in those eyes, so I dug them out with my knife. I don't remember what I did with them after that. I'm sure they'll turn up somewhere.

I don't even want to think about this mess I

have to clean up. I'll bet the janitor who mops all the stray animal guts off the slaughter-house floor doesn't like his job. I've never met anyone who does that. He probably doesn't get out much. That line of work is becoming less and less socially acceptable these days.

The police showed up a while ago. I figured they would, with all the screaming and carrying on from my husband. At first, the two officers seemed like they were going to arrest me, but then I carved a piece of his leg for them. Both were surprised at how tender he was. I gave them a few cuts, but there wasn't much to spare since most of him was all chopped up. I did a sloppy job, I admit.

I'm getting a little hungry. I'm surprised at my appetite after this whole ordeal. My husband would be asking me right about now to cook him up something. Something that probably used to walk around on four legs and answered all remarks with "Moooo. . . ." I almost desisted until I realized that animals don't wear Armani suits. I should have made him change his clothes first, such a shame to let that nice suit go to waste. He was a snappy dresser. I'll miss that about him.

- Colleen McKinnon



Mend
- Chris Sleboda

Stacks

I can feel it, like a hammer thudding relentlessly at the base of my heart, a nervous fear that's hard to conceal, a fear born of both terror and reverence. My fingers start to throb and my jaw hums. The fluid in my mouth disappears and my ears become alive with the sounds of a near empty room. I can hear them walking behind the stacks, behind the rows, the holy words that walked among the ancient trees. They're here. My face breaks out in goose flesh and cold sweat drips down my arm pits to my sides. I look down at the book spread out on the desk before me and my swallow clicks like a revolver hitting an empty chamber. I know the rules, I tell myself. I'll be fine. I know the rules.

I can almost hear them whispering, lost behind the creaks of old wood and the noise of unopened books. I can almost hear them calling me, taunting me, challenging me to find them where they lie hidden, in the next aisle, around the next corner. There they sit claws ready, numerous heads poised, many arms taut and outstretched. I'm scared, scared in a way I haven't been in a long, long time. I'm scared and I smile a coyote grin.

The old blood in me rises to the top and I slough off this pop culture coat of americana I've been wearing like a shroud. The Roman, the Hun, the Magyar, start to call to me from the pits of soul. My fingers thud with nervous blood and the veins that fill my teeth slowly start to ache. My eyes fill with the blood that started it all and I hear someone move at the other end of the library. I near loose my bladder.

I don't look though. I can't look. I know the rules. . . . Too many monsters, too many old uncontrolled gods, too many. I hear them and I'm petrified with fear. God, so this is what it was like all those years back, all those years back when gods walked beneath the hyperborean blossoms and tritons lurked beneath the warm blue waves. My arms are ripe with goose bumps and every piece of wood in the building seems to be groaning and settling.

My finger, slightly trembling, runs itself over the picture I've been so entranced by and as I

half obscured by shadows, a chill jumps up my spine like an electric jolt and the whole world seems to close in on me. I can hear them getting closer. I turn the page with a loud hiss of the page against my shirt. I swallow harder and louder than before. The scrape of old paper against cotton sounds like a hammer on an anvil to me. They know where I am. I can feel them moving. I'm naked before them, no charms, no talismans, no mojo. Just me and the vain notion I know what I'm doing.

A Hindu goddess is on the next page, an ancient and wizened statue that causes sweat to roll off me. Years ago in the Metropolitan Museum of Art I had seen a similar statue. I'd stood there entranced, lost in its curves and motions, petrified that at any moment the old god would move, step down towards me. Though it's only a photo, there's still power in it, still a magic to it that scares me senseless yet compels me to move closer. I run my shaky finger around the subtle bend of her chin and neck and wish I could do the same to the real thing.

I turn the page, this time making sure I lift it from where it rests against my chest. They're still out there though, calling me. I can feel them the way a sleeping person is roused by the entrance of another person into the room. I can taste them now, old paper, cinnamon and mildew in the nose and on the tongue, Gorgon sweat and angel shit, Pan's breath and Ler's blood. Everything is three degrees off. I'm cut off from the rest of the world. I've been dropped in a silent black sea with no light or boat, only the cold water and the knowledge that there is something slick and serpentine around me, moving the waters against me, darting beneath my frantically kicking legs. Jesus, I'm scared shitless. I know the rules.

It's the age. I can feel it. It's like a physical force slamming into me. Old, these are old gods, older than men, older than time. The dreaming Vishnu, the horned god of Gaul, the bloody Titan. They're so close to me, but yet so far. My mouth is still crypt dry.

Templeless, homeless, this is where they are now. No followers, no libations, no sacrifices. This is where they have hidden, whispers, ghosts of giants and men and monsters. I realize that now.

Anchor Watt, the name pops into my head from somewhere deep inside me. Anchor Watt, a place that even, in pictures, frightens me. It's old and powerful, full of untamed fury and magic. These gods, these gods that flock around me like a moth to a dying flame, have lost their places of power. They are ghosts errant, homeless and friendless, but they still have power.

Museums, libraries, ruins, that's where they hide and rest, places where man is still in their shadow, places where the six bloody arms of Khali thrown up to the sky still bring a chill to the flesh and causes the blood to grow thick. I never felt this way in my church, where a doe-eyed virgin stared down at me, an idol long ago brought to heel, a god whose fury was halted, whose power was drained by hungry men. These are different, deities majestic and wise, unpolluted by science, untouched by the anti-magic, barbaric and noble. I can hear them, I can hear them so well. They'll kill me if I don't know their rules, flay me in a hundred hells, devour my spleen and set buzzards to pick my liver from me for all time. I'm so very, very scared.

I get up and put the book down. I can still hear them, but they become quieter, lower. I close the book and it sounds like a gun shot. They're in the next aisle, watching me through the cracks between books, from the tops of the stacks. I can hear their hisses and mews, the cackle of jackal-headed boatmen, the stink of unwashed dead, the laugh of thunder, the shuffles of myriad pseudopods and legs. I swallow hard and throw on my coat with as much ease as I can muster in a vain attempt not to show them fear. I know the rules, I've studied them all my life. I know the rules like I know my own flesh, but yet I'm so terrified, so utterly frightened of what will happen if I fail, if I lose heart or falter if my bow is not low enough, by beat not loud enough, my Chi not centered. I know the rules. Then again, so did Faust and Dee and Scott and Walker. I know the rules. I sigh and I smile and I can hear them all about me, on all sides.

I close my eyes and fight to keep them that way. I feel them come closer to me, just inches away, attacking, dancing, fucking, kow towing. I can feel them, and my balls shrivel up inside me.

It's like a beat in my head, the fey dance around me, the Unseelie court pounding a steady rhythm on drums taut with the skin of babes. They're so close, so very close. I can smell their age and taste their savagery. I close my eyes tight and count to three. I know the rules, I tell myself. They won't hurt me, I'm here in peace. I smile the grin of a man standing on a gallows and I realize how much shit I am exactly in. I laugh a bit and I hear them step back a little. God help me, I think.

Then I realize he can't.

I open my eyes.

- Bernie Kovacs



Meniscus and Crescent
- Chris Sleboda

The Wake

The AM alarm fires
short bursts of reality
into
the
slumbering flesh
of the dreamer
6 feet under soiled sheets.
Deep into the death go I
To join the choir visible.

- James Warner

One day perhaps

One day perhaps,
though not without strife,
I will grave the moon
with such a delicate
hand that,--
only now she speaks,
I one day perhaps,
without knowing,
will whisper soft words
and say,--
"What brazen words
and now I seem to
have forgotten the way
by which I came!"
And then she will say,
"And I am not
the moon."

- Joseph Cortegerone

First Person

I've lost my mind. No question. Insanity reigns. My God, I have to get myself together! I'm late. Just a few minutes though. He hates it when I'm late. Thank God I remembered to show up. Lost in my own little world. . .walking for hours. And the streets all look the same. It's true what they say. Hell is not a place, it's a state of mind. The state of my mind. Oh, yeah. . . this is Hell.

There they are, my husband and his mother. My husband. That sounds so foreign now. I DO have a husband. Maybe if I keep saying that it will make it seem more. . . real. My husband. My husband. Okay, deep breath. They're coming over. Smile. Sincerely.

Sorry I'm late. Traffic was awful. Mom, it's so good to see you! You look wonderful! It's been such a long time. . .Can they tell? No, they don't suspect a thing. They wouldn't look that happy if they knew what I'd been doing today. Stop thinking about it! Be calm. Relaxed. Concentrate on making it to the table without falling or bumping into anything. My knees are like rubber. Come on, it's not that hard to walk across a room! I can do this. One foot in front of the other. Take his arm. Everyone says we make a perfect couple. Such a perfect couple.

This room is enormous, the ceiling must be twenty feet high! Can't we get a table closer to the door? All this space and so little air. Keep breathing. White. Everything is so white. White walls, white floors, white linen, white light. Our white wedding, remember that? It's too bright in here. I can't breathe. . .the silence is suffocating me. All rushed whispers -- as if this were a funeral! I think my head is going to explode right here. It's like being trapped in a cloud; not enough color or sound. Why couldn't we have gone somewhere else? I will not cry. I have to get control of myself. Now. Right now.

And I always thought I'd be such a wonderful actor, that's a laugh. All those years watching films and thinking that I could do it so much better than they could. Now we know the truth though, don't we? To get stage fright and forget the lines. Another illusion shattered. Well, I can't keep play-

ing with the silverware all night. I've got to think of something to say!

Look at him. So pleased with himself. Entertaining his mother with stories of how clever he is. He doesn't suspect a thing. What about his mother? Nope, she's just so delighted to be here. Well, it is a lovely restaurant. Look at all those windows. An entire wall of windows. And the sky is so clear that you can see all the way up to Heaven. Just beautiful. Vertigo. Oh, don't get sick!

I'll have white wine. Lots and lots of white wine. I don't think that I could swallow anything solid. Let them go ahead and order, I'll just say I had a late lunch. Lunch. Well that's one name for it. I can't believe I had the courage to go through with this. I am so brave. So daring! They have no idea how daring I am. They have no idea *who* I am.

Who may join us? Oh god, no. Oh, please, please, please don't let him show up. This can't really be happening, it must be a nightmare. No. Nightmares are never this bad.

You ran into him this afternoon? . . .Yes, it sure would be fun to get together. . . .If you're not sure that he can make it, we'll just wait a few more minutes. . .Relax. He'd never show up here. No decent person would sleep with his friend's wife and then meet them both for dinner. That would be insane. I'm safe.

Yes, he sure is a great guy. I need a drink. Concentrate on keeping the glass steady. . .almost there. Only spilled a little. They won't notice. God, they noticed.

Do I look pale? . . .No, I'm not sick. Maybe a little tired. . . .No, I'm not cold. I'm just shaky because I haven't eaten today. I'll be fine. . . . Really. I'm fine. Does adultery affect everyone this way? Just go on with your conversation and pretend I'm not here.

My God, he's here. I can't believe he actually came. Why would anyone endure this if they didn't have to? Where's his sense of decency? This is completely immoral! Did he think I'd want to see him here? Unbelievable. He's shaking my hand. All smiles. Oh so proper. Keeping his distance. But he's all buddy-buddy with my husband. Of course, they're best friends. How can he be such a hypocrite? Oh, why did he come? He must be

as upset about what happened as I am. Nope. Guess not. He's enjoying himself. Sadist.

Look at the way he's flirting with that waitress. Smiling at her from under his eyelashes. . . that sweet little half smile. And she's smiling back. He's actually touching her hand! I'm going to be sick. That's the way he used to act with me. He's like that with everyone! It's disgusting. He's probably had dozens of other men's wives in his bed. It must be his hobby. I can see it now; he seduces the wife and then he meets the husband for dinner to gloat.

Oh, I have been such a simple-minded little fool. How could I be so stupid? Well, it will never happen again. I'll spend the rest of my life making this up to him. I'll be the perfect wife. . . I must have been crazy to ever. . .

He's watching me. What is he thinking? He has the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. I could drown in those eyes. What am I thinking? I'm married. I know I don't love him. I don't think I even like him. I don't like him. This makes no sense. I can't stop thinking about him. I'm obsessed. . .this is not good. Not good at all.

You want to take mom to that new jazz club? Oh, she'll just love that. Will this night never end? Suppose my husband does know and wants to see how far I'll go before I collapse, sobbing and begging for forgiveness. No. He doesn't know. He could never play it so cool. He'd be screaming to everyone about what a slut I am. Or maybe he'd cry. I couldn't bear that. I'd rather die than to see him cry. I don't want to hurt him.

I'm sorry, I can't go. I'm not really feeling well. But don't ruin your evening on account of me, the three of you go on ahead. I'll grab a taxi and get to bed early. . . No, it's decided. I'll be fine. . . . I insist that you go, how often do you get to see your mother? I am going to scream. Right here in the middle of all these civilized people. Don't lose it now. It's almost over. Deep breaths. Sincere smile. Almost free.

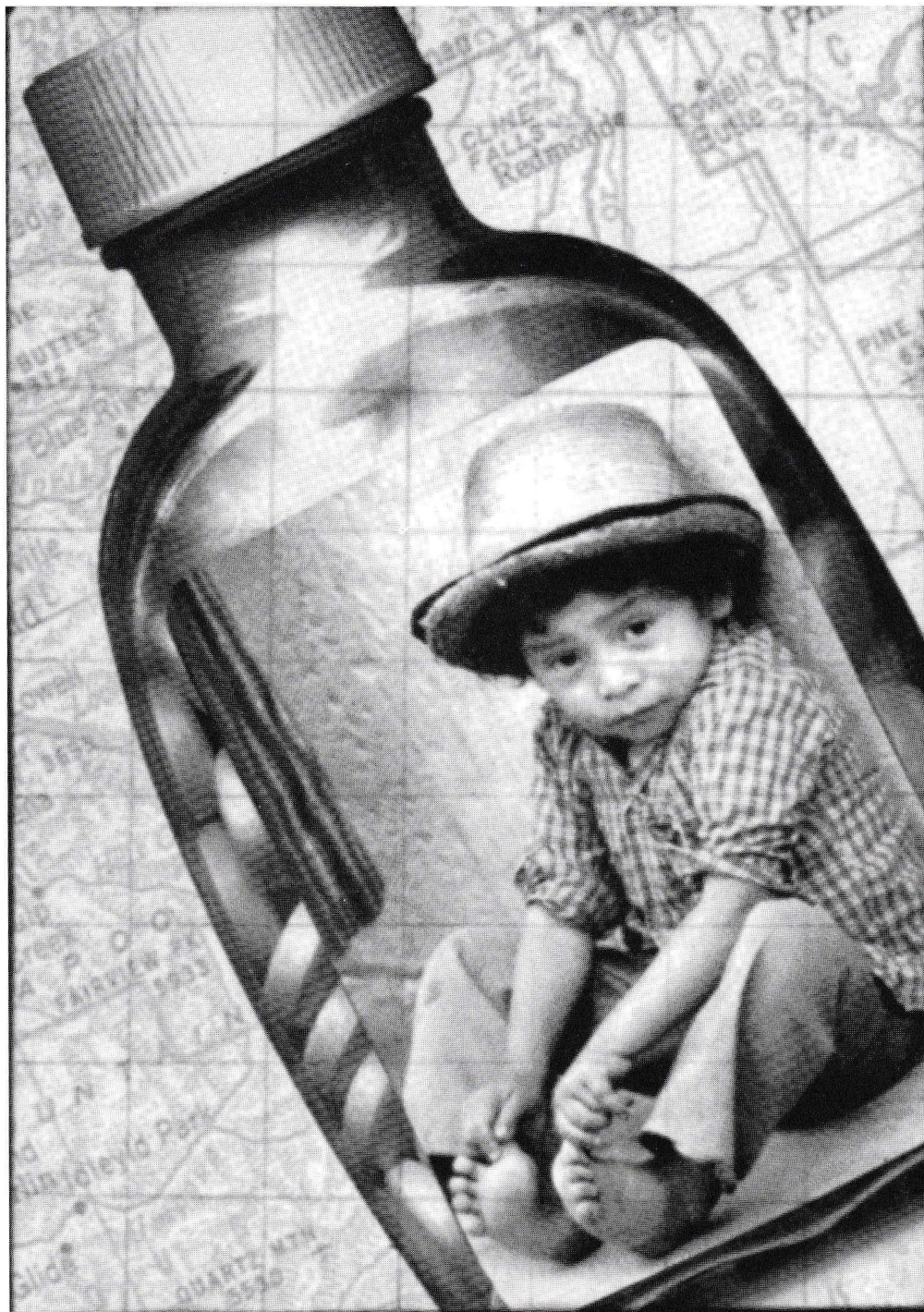
He's saying he was planning on an early night and would be glad to drive me home. Too cruel. My husband is actually thanking him for taking care of me. Yeah, sure. What are friends for?

He has his arm around me, and they're all

smiling. His skin smells so good. The pressure of his body against mine. . .there's no hope. I want this. I would sell my soul to be with him just one more time.

Stop! I've lost my mind, that's it. I can't let this happen. I will tell him that I'm sorry, but that it was all a mistake and to please just go away. Then I'll walk out the door alone. But. . .oh god, look at those eyes. . .

- Karen Handley



Untitled Collage
- Molly Baines

Is it you?

There is someone here,
in this very room--
listening
waiting for you,
silently,
walking sometimes
sometimes crawling about
the floor looking
under tables
under chairs
under the hunched over biscuit
in the corner of the room--
(hard, laughing at your
hunger. . .angry. . .
but not stepped upon.

- Joseph Cortegerone

Antithesis

Lying on the ceiling
And looking at the floor
Listening to the windows speak
And then they are no more.

Walking down the wall
And seeing all the colors
Flowers where their faces are
The faces of my brothers.

See the rising raindrops
Passing through the glass
Over there balloons descend
They're fitted all in brass.

Sirens blaring in the distance
Or is that just the phone?
Why are all these people here?
Or am I all alone?

- Maria S. Giunta

Marvin and Tammi

Did you ever think that you'd be fucking Miss Perfect Teen Dream here -- in an alley -- leaning on a dumpster, feeling bone chilly, and strung out on a shared needle of junk? Her thighs are cold to the touch -- frigid. You swear you see frost. . .this is where you found her. . .lying discarded in a heap of forgotten dreams. The Walled City is infamous for eating its young. As you undo her shirt, baring her world-weary nipples to the cold, you think Miss Perfect, it strikes you as odd that once she was IT.

It strikes you as odd, way back then, that she was nice, even though she never had to be nice. As your lungs fill up with exhaled Exxon exhaustion, you can only smell popcorn butter -- golden in its oozy-goopy flow, running south down your palm in the old Mayfield Theater. Saturday was matinee day. It was also the day she worked the ticket booth. For some reason, being encased in the cylindrical glass display was a good place for her to be -- here she could be presented, examined curiously, languished over, but still untouchable. Pearly white, she had a golden sheen to her -- radiating from her strawberry blond hair to her neck and south. This birdcage that encased her only allowed her to be seen topside. She was Perfect, from her icy cool blue eyes to the teardrop blossoms on her chest. You never saw breasts up close in those days, but you knew the difference between droopy and firm; these were as firm as your reaction to them, so to speak. You'd pay your \$1.50, see a movie, but it didn't matter. The awkward moment where the words "one please" seem to not only squeak out of pressed lips, but to squeak out the tightest of sphincters -- that's what it was all about.

For ninety minutes you'd stare blankly at the brightest part of the darkened theatre, the door out. The door outside, to life beyond the Walled City where life was not about friction. . .where a guy like you could have a girl like her to hold, to fawn over, to love with an unrequited fare. . .you know the time, you and her could hold hands and listen to Marvin and Tammi tell each other "you're all I need to get by."

"you're all . . ."

You'd hold her with a gentle firmness, brushing back that strawberry blonde mop with one hand. . .

"I need. . ."

You'd lean in close just to breathe in the life she radiated. . .

"to get by. . ."

You'd both know love could never be no more or no less. . .

Sometimes you'd catch yourself singing those lines "you're all. . .I need. . .to get by." It was a mantra to you. The more you thought about it, your eyes felt like stained glass shattering in an ice storm. Your throat got knotted, sailor hog-tied and true in its lies. Seventeen in the Walled City was a death sentence -- so was feeling. The Walled City, being a gambling town, was about chance. When you didn't have one, what could you do? Guarded optimism only works when there is something to defend. More often than not you resigned yourself to seeing nothing worth fighting for. . .that was Sunday through Friday. . .Saturday, here was your Helen of Troy, here was Maid Marrison, here was Guinevere. . .this is all you needed to get by. . .

What did she need? Definitely not you, well not you then. . .maybe not you now. You are brought back to here and now by her -- she wrestles with your khakis struggling to get at your essence. It seems to be a struggle, but once these weather-beaten hands reach you, more direct discourse seems to be taking place. Fucking, as it were, was something primal, like jungle drums and that Zulu movie with Michael Caine. You are being sieged.

The panic rises like your dick in her hands -- it's been said that what a culture values can be directly tied to the number of words used to mean the same thing. Here in the states, the two most bedecked items -- money and penis. You fidget your hips, guided slowly into her. As you enter her, where there should be an ease -- a heightened sense of pleasure, tension builds even more. You buck and thrust in unison, the clanging of the dumpster awakens a sleeping bum in the adjacent dumpster, you don't care, but yet you don't enjoy

this. You open your eyes and you see the dirty
whore she has become. Icy cool blue has been
melted by the surrounding sea of bloodshot red
. . .the strawberry blonde is greasy and knotted.
The skin is an unhealthy white, like uncooked
dough -- it is malleable in your hands. The great
teardrop figures seem to have fulfilled the sullen
destiny of their metaphor. . .her arm is a shooting
gallery mosaic, enough tracer marks to light up a
Hanoi twilight ambush. At one time, when you
closed your eyes, you'd never wish for this moment
to end. Now eyes open; the moment couldn't pass
by fast enough.

The end is near, in wrinkles of time that are
folding and overlapping over this moment, she
draws upon that magic of old, pulls you in close
and whispers those lines:

"you're all. . .I need. . .to get by."

You jerk upright, she turns in spasms. You
pull away quickly, effortlessly, and as cum runs
down her leg, she loses her balance and falls back-
ward into the trash.

You. . .you just walk away.

- James Warner



When Ideas & Emotions Collide

- Chris Sleboda

It's a Bird, It's a Plane, No It's . . . My Grandma?

I think Superman was based on someone's sixty-five year old grandmother who dedicated her life to making sure her grandchildren were safe and her house was always spotless. It makes perfect sense. My grandmother doesn't have x-ray vision, but she can spot a stain on a wine glass or a thunderstorm coming from over fifty miles away. And while my grandmother can't exactly circle the Earth in less than 2.5 seconds, she can, however, clean the bathroom, polish the floor, and cook a three course meal in comparable time.

Superman spends most of his time rescuing human lives and my grandmother can preserve the life of a Dunkin' Donut for over six years and still manage to keep it fresh. Superman can balance a three-ton tractor trailer on his shoulders and my grandmother can balance the ashes on the end of her cigarette until they grow to be three and a half inches long.

However, there is one thing that my grandmother can do that would even amaze Superman. She can heal any disease, bacteria, or virus that ever existed, or at least "comfort" someone until they heal themselves. She once woke a coma patient and sent a man in an entire body cast running for his life; which is exactly why I and my family members have learned never to let her know when we are sick.

I remember a couple of weeks ago when I was so sick I couldn't get out of bed. She called me forty-two times that day. Five of those times my answering machine picked up and my musical message played all the way through.

"How can you hear me talking over all that music?" she asked later that day.

"You have to wait for the beep, Grandma," I reminded her. Modern technology always escapes her.

"Oh, you're right, Honey, I forgot. Well, anyway how do you feel?"

Now, it's a well known fact in my family that when my grandmother asks "how do you feel?" it's

a trick. There's an art to answering this question perfected by my uncle during a chicken pox epidemic in the early Sixties when she nearly drowned him in Aveeno bath. I had to answer quickly, but not too quickly. I had to be calm and nonchalant. "Fine" and "Okay," were always out of the question. That was as good as saying "call the paramedics -- I'm going to die!!!"

"How do you feel?" she asked again.

I panicked and said, "Fine, I guess." At that moment the ground shook, thunder roared, and the sky grew dark. I had just said the unspeakable. Four generations of hard work were ruined with those words. I could hear her changing into her cape and sweater with the giant letter "G" embroidered on the chest.

"Oh, I'll be right there. Are you wearing scuffies? Keep your feet warm when you are sick. Stay in bed. Does Mommy have orange juice in the house? I'll bring some anyway. Are you sure you're keeping warm? Take two Tylenol. Drink lots of fluids and gargle with salt water," and with that she hung up. There was nothing I could do.

Approximately six minutes later she arrived. According to my grandmother there are three basic rules everyone must follow in order to lead a safe, meaningful life:

1. Immediately bombard all stained clothing with spot removers. (Most of my scars are due to chemical burns.)
2. Keep a religious statue in every new car. My new Nissan has been mistaken for a shrine.
3. When sick, cover all body parts that do not require oxygen.

So naturally, when she saw me she was more than appalled and dedicated the rest of the day to making me comfortable. She hurled me into bed, propped pillows behind my head until my chin touched my chest, turned the heat up until my eyeballs dried out, poured gallons of chicken soup down my throat, and tucked the sheets so tightly beneath the mattress that I lost circulation from the neck down.

"There, now aren't you comfortable?" she asked.

I shifted my eyeballs her way. My neck was

too stiff to move. I repeated over and over, "Dr. Kervorkian, where are you?"

Twenty-four hours later, I never felt better, so I went to her house to thank her.

"Not now," she said. "Your uncle has the flu."

She ran past me and I could have sworn I saw her red cape stuffed in her hand bag.

- Diana Davis
WINNER ESSAY

Waiting Room

It's like standing in a glass box
Trapped like an albino rat
Afraid to break to glass
It'll bleed, burn, then stitches,
ER, waiting room, pain
Killers everywhere
Who's to say if you'll even
get out of this glass box?
Plexi-glass is shatter proof
Like pride might kill you
Not only a lunatic
People kill for money
Human life can be bought and sold
There is a fee to pay
Green with envy, I digress
What mad situation does this
reap from?
Natured or nurtured, anyway
Close, captive, containment
May or may not be a glass box
If I decide to kick it, witch?

- Mauranita Miller



Untitled Sketch
- Molly Baines

My Friend

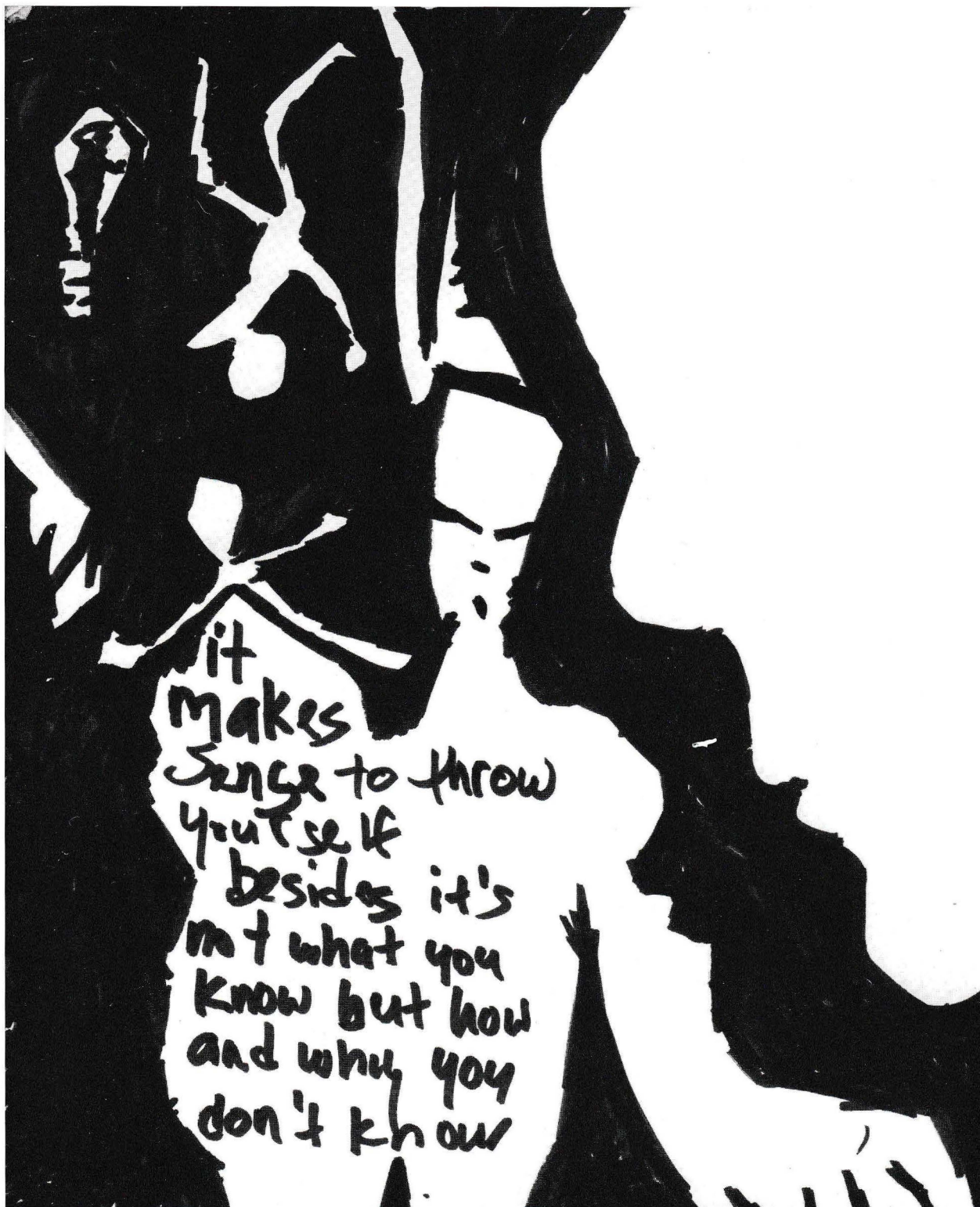
When you are at the boiling point
And words are lacking truth
Yet, there is nothing you can do
I will bid you adieu
And one last thing before I go
A few choice words for you
When you take a test it's one thing
But, to give it is another
Don't test me
You punk ass mother fucker

- Mauranita Miller

Summerpoem (for Vicki)

Wasting waiting away
under dustbowl covers
and barefoot gravity
Country crickets find all the right ways to assure you.
The grass holds you up to the moon
for a marbled-skinned appraisal:
the look of softening hardness.
Only in your nighttime nakedness does a July summersky
comfort you
release you
let you stay
forever seven.

- James Warner



Pisspore Recognition
- Mike Cahill

Bungled Dalliance

Incipience of a poem presents grief,
when indolence and idleness preside.
The longer you stave off, the more relief
you have to procrastinate and to hide.

Prolongation of something with lengthy words
such as filibuster and postponement
makes cunctation as easy as painted birds
who are etched forever in the firmament.

But alas these words fill up my page,
my loitering begins to turn.
The actors have all appeared on their stage
in moratorium, their lines to learn.

Now I who deferred beginnings,
am cornered to delay this end.
And all that could save are the beat of those wings.
In that rhythm is my one true friend.

The eleventh hour now shades my clock.
Still I shun to finish or quit.
Oh Morpheus descend with your massive flock --
Perhaps 'twould be best to sleep on it.

- Sean Flannery

Tree

Whose long and lofty layered arms
do hold the halls of Heaven high?
Whose roots are burned by hell below
that feed the fires where sinners lie?

Who witnessed once the waning reign
of proud Lucifer, lost lord of light?
Who framed the folly of the Fall:
saw armies hurled from Heavenly Height?

Whose blackened branch with man once built
a cross to crucify a King?
On whom were written great works of old
whose praises still the poets sing?

Who's sent to serve in saintly state
to hang Christ high for all to see
and guards the greatest good of man
can only be the Tree?

- Matt Himlin

Is there an "e" in shiny? (The Glagolitic Lemon)

Punish
All
aParent
shinnEy
aRse-heads

They
sOmehow
Will
Eat
Love
(Are there two "Ls" - in towell?)

- Joseph Cortegerone



*and the seven stars go squawking like geese
about the sky*

- Mike Cahill

Orphee, after Cocteau's Orphee but in Another Time

This night, my God -- what evil things I've done!
the wind and cold and rain upon my mind
has bade me kill both kith and kind:
No man, no God, no love have I in mind,
just Death, for whom my life is charter'd thus
and thus through thoughts these things will be rhym'd
so none so bold speak, "He will forsake us!"
so my conscience clear'd and pure will be thus!

O dusk I saw you falling through the storm
and bloody red and grey did I abhor;
Your vagrant wisps of covert deadly form
did soothe me, raping all my mind's good store!
Then Death did come up from the rancid ground
and sooth'd my mind with bloody poisoned words
and then we sank from sight without a sound
into the ground where one, of darkness, learns
and where all thoughts of Holiness one spurns!

There, in depths of such most men will ne'er see
rank words befell my ears and chased my mind
and then a woman spoke so soft to me,
"Orphee, 'tis me your true love kith and kind!"
So soft and fare and full of things so kind
she said her words and clasp'd my hand with hers.
"Come dear Orphee without your fear so blind!"
My God, I knew her face, her mind; such blurs
within myself I asked what secret stirs!

"Heurtebise!" Such strange a name flew through me!
"Heurtebise!" said the woman near me fast
and then a figure weeping startled me,
he took my hand and led me through the past
through thoughts and deeds I soon shall never know
the woman, Death, lay weeping for what ought
be done to me; she knew I had to go!
Dear Eurydice now lives for what death sought:
Death died this day like now my every thought!

- Joseph Cortegerone

Nine Poems

I.

Is it you
that lit - the stars
with your extra-fine
shiny cola?
with your pack of jeans
with your fetish smiles
with that damn way you
look at me in the morning
with your humane eyes
and that little cut you got
doing something
grown-up-like; monotonous:
- smiling
I like it when you smile. . .
you
you
you like to spend time
playing certain games
with your soft glances
and my
in oper tuneness. . .
humming-- perhaps/
a while--
with-
out me. . .

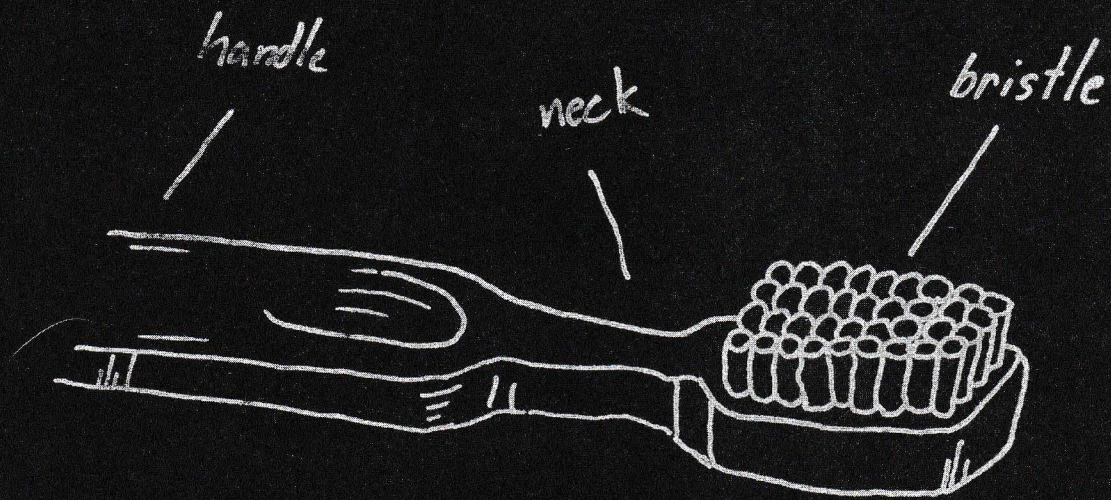
- Joseph Cortegerone

A Thundering in Arcadia

On those pale fall mornings that expectorate dew from their sinuses I gypsily traverse the field, the country side of urban expanse, overrun with every offspring of the founding crickets. They are harmless inhabitants of the potter's sober grass, ever-cognizant of the coolness that bathes their bare heads while serving in this chorus I've stumbled upon.

And yet those with undying devotion to the song, misplaced that prevalent instinct of their being hold their ground and diminuendo to the applause of my cacophonous feet.

- Sean Flannery



SPECIMEN 12A
the tooth brush
a small brush for cleaning the teeth

Specimen 12A

- Chris Sleboda

Third Person

Conversation stopped the second that the door slammed behind them, and they walked to the car in silence. Jamie hunched her shoulders against the rain wondering again why she did things like this. Watching an oil slick form rainbows in a puddle beneath the wheel, her foot slipped off the curb, twisting her ankle and sending shooting pains up through her shin. Damn platform shoes! She punched the roof of the rusty blue Dodge and jerked the handle up, sliding in among the debris. This guy would never win the good housekeeping award, that's for sure. Shoving piles of unopened mail and yellowing newspapers down to the floor to mix with the cigarette butts overflowing from the ashtray, she stabbed her own cigarette into the pile, sending down a fresh avalanche of butts. . .that made her smile. She took a deep breath. The odor of rot, something rancid and decomposing, rose up from beneath her feet. Like sour milk, only worse. She imagined the lumpy white curds, still damp, enmeshed in the carpet fibers, turning a motley shade of green under the trash. At least it was warm.

Billy Ray slid in the driver's side and pushed the seat back as far as it would go. She didn't look at him. The bar sign flashed patterns of neon orange and pink down onto the rain-splattered windshield. She watched transfixed by myriad prisms of alternating color. Every spot a different world. Appearing. Disappearing. Reappearing. Forcing themselves on her consciousness. A thought was tugging on the edge of her mind. . . not again. . .*the infrastructure is crumbling.* What the hell does that mean? The phrase kept running through her mind, like a song you can't get rid of. She imagined huge boulders breaking free of their mortar and tumbling down. . .where? Nowhere. Through space. Crumbling into the nothingness of the darkness.

"Com'mere, baby. Come to Daddy," he said, reaching a hand around her shoulder and pulling her across the seat to where he was sitting. She was too thin for his tastes. He could feel bones poking through her flesh. She shivered in

the thin shirt and shorts that she'd lived in for the past three days. She didn't have the energy to change. A lime green retro 70's thrift store find. It used to be her favorite outfit. But now it just seemed old. And worn. And sad. Her smell sickened her, but he was too drunk to notice. Or if he did notice, he didn't care.

She slid a hand up the inside of his thigh, along the seam of his grimy jeans and up to his belt. "Oh, yeah," he moaned. His large stomach hung over his belt and she bit her lip, concentrating on the best way to open his fly. He didn't help. He just sat there with his eyes closed, rubbing the back of her neck and making this humming sound in the back of his throat. "Hmmmmm. . ." People were walking past on the sidewalk, but no one noticed them. It wouldn't have mattered to her if they did.

She took the head of his penis into her mouth and traced circles across the tip with her tongue. "Oh, that's it," he said, pushing her head down as far as it would go. She gagged, struggling to get away. He was too strong. Massive, insistent hands holding her down. She could see the headlines now, *Woman suffocated in car during oral sex.* Well, what the hell. At least it's unique. There were worse ways to die. She relaxed and went with it.

She was amazed to find that she could still breathe. How was that possible? She wanted to ask him if he could feel her breath. Just out of curiosity. Did it feel warm or cold? But when she tried to speak, there was no sound -- not a hum, not a moan. Nothing. Her vocal cords didn't even vibrate. Now that was interesting. The muscles of her esophagus went into spasm, contracting in a hard regular rhythm around his penis. She fought against the nausea clenching her stomach knowing the vomit would go straight to her lungs, drowning her. Funny how one minute you're ready to die and the next you're not. It isn't that she really cared to live, but if she was going to go it would be on her own terms. Death by vomit was definitely not the way to go.

Billy Ray let out a long, low groan as semen pumped down her throat. She could taste the biting alkaline flavor as he pulled out. God, she hated men. She wiped her mouth and got out of the car

without looking back. It never seemed to get any better.

She looked for her cigarettes. Three left. She should have asked to borrow a few bucks to buy a pack. What was his name anyway? Bobby? Tommy? Something common. She'd seen him a few times with his biker friends. Very unsavory. God, she had to stop giving blow jobs to strangers. That was no way to live your life. No fucking way at all.

She walked down the avenue. The lights from the bars and restaurants reflecting off the wet asphalt reminded her of Mardi Gras. New Orleans became insane then. So much decadence. So many tourists. So much noise. Those cheap plastic necklaces they throw to the crowds. She hated it all. It wouldn't be long now.

The rain slowed to a mist, but the night was sharp and she could see her breath billowing in smokey clouds in front of her. She sat down on the wet pavement leaning back against a tree to light a cigarette.

People passing by. No one noticing her. She was invisible. She imagined dissolving into the sidewalk. Nothing left but a dirty little black circle where she'd been sitting. People thinking she was just an old piece of gum stuck to the concrete. "Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt. . . ."

She wished she had some gum. Anything to get rid of the taste of lover boy's stinking cum. She mused on the different textures and flavors of semen. Like cheese. She preferred smooth and mellow, but his was sort of lumpy and stinky. Yes, actually chunky. Not good at all. Well, she thought, if she wanted quality she'd have to frequent a better bar. She watched the people eating through the restaurant windows across the street and tried to remember the last time she'd had food. Sometime yesterday. She was out of money. Her stomach screamed in revolt. Time for home.

- Karen Handley
WINNER SHORT STORY

In addition to publishing this magazine, the Manuscript Society also sponsors readings and workshops on campus with poets, fiction writers, and dramatists, as well as trips to performances and conferences in New York, New Jersey, and within Pennsylvania.

Meetings are held every Thursday at noon, on the third floor of Chase Hall. If you would like to get in involved in next year's publication, we encourage you to join the weekly meetings.

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