

# MANUSCRIPT



# Manuscript

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**Volume XLVIII  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### POETRY

<i>1995 Poetry Contest Winner</i>		
Mine Fires	Bill Rasmovicz	5
<i>1995 Poetry Contest Runner-up</i>		
For Crying Out Loud	Susan Kovaleski	17
Shared Treasure	Donna Bytheway	6
(Daddy Can You Hear Me?)	Marisa Rae	6
Vicarious Rebirth	Susan Kovaleski	10
Violent Moment	Ed McGinnis	13
Playing The Game	Tim Williams	15
What She Hears In Her Head	Holly Jones	16
Grace	Bill Rasmovicz	27
Loosened	Ed McGinnis	28
(It's days like this)	Marisa Rae	28
Best Damn Popcorn I Ever Ate	Susan Kovaleski	30
(that sweatshirt of yours)	Marisa Rae	30
A Bitter Woman	Karen Ziagos	35
January Five 9 Five	Tim Williams	37
Burial Ground	Susan Kovaleski	38
Rain Shower	Patty Puerling	39
Neried	Ed McGinnis	40

### PROSE & DRAMA

<i>1995 Prose Contest Winner</i>		
The Prize Inside the Cereal Box	Karen Ruduski	29
<i>1995 Drama Contest Winner</i>		
Blackness	Eric Riviera	11
Footprints	Deirdre Swinden	7
Unsuspecting	Tarah Trivelpiece	14
(The smoke filtering...)	Tarah Trivelpiece	24
Lazurus and The Butcher	Bernie Kovacs	25
The Nightmare	Deirdre Swinden	31
Confession of a Daughter of Cain	Susan Kovaleski	36

### ART

<i>1995 Art Contest Winner</i>		
The Dead, the Dying, and the Struggle Within	Robert Wittman	cover
Decisions	Amy Blease	18
Untitled	Anonymous	19
2X2X12013	Robert Wittman	20
Changes	Amy Blease	21
Untitled	Henry Bisco	22
Eve of the Second Millenium	Donna Bytheway	23



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In addition to publishing this magazine, the Manuscript also sponsors readings and workshops on campus with poets, fiction writers, and dramatists. Trips to other performances and conferences to New York, New Jersey and within the state are also sponsored by the Society. Manuscript meetings are held every Thursday at noon, on the third floor of Chase Hall. If you would like to get involved in next year's publication, please feel free to join the weekly meetings.

## MINE FIRES

Having only heard stories  
and never really known our father's fathers,  
we crept into the breaker  
expecting to find their skeletons  
thrown up on racks like moldy coats  
in the cellar stairway,  
jaws still locked and caught in mid sentence.  
We were young. Anything was possible  
we knew. For years

we fashioned the huge spaces within;  
cogs still grinding, faces  
sealed in dust in the high, black windows,  
the eternity of machines.  
One by one then and holding on to each other's  
shirts, we found ourselves inside, stumbling  
over the wreckages of wood and steel,  
over the vacant dreams of all that was happening, trying  
to peel back with every step  
the thin membranous darkness.  
We were scared. Scared of what we'd find,  
of ghostly encounters, but scared more perhaps  
to learn of what had never been there-  
just the skin and bones of words and memories that our  
parents had to dig out for us  
and the invisible remains of life's tragic lives.  
Discovering there was nothing left behind,  
we quickly wanted out!  
And so, having never gotten to know our father's  
fathers, we left running, screaming, smashing  
windows, assuring ourselves we'd never return:

Their secret identities trapped  
like a little flame at the core of our hearts.

To this day if you look to the North  
you can see smoke rising from the cracks.  
Four hundred feet in the side of this mountain  
there are fires still burning  
in the deepest fissure, the darkest vein.

**BILL RASMOVICZ**

## SHARED TREASURE

As we walked beside the sandy road  
the sun flashed off a semi-buried crystal.

We stooped and dug out with our fingers  
a faceted, glass doorknob.

To the nine year old boy, it was a diamond  
which he laid upon the pillow  
of his sleeping great-grandma.

## DONNA BYTHEWAY

6

Daddy can you hear me?

another notch on my bedpost...

No salvation there little one  
Tell your Mommy you're coming soon.  
She won't like you there

birds and bees sting...  
my daddy teaches me.

MARISA RAE



## FOOTPRINTS

### DEIRDRE SWINDEN

"This sucks."

"Murphy Anderson you watch dat tongue afor I rip it right outta yo' mouth."

But it seemed true enough. This really did suck, the rain, the lightin'. Everythin' was jus unbearable. The kitchen was stiflin' me sos I had to get out. Murphy provided my relief. Someone to shout at was always useful.

"But Ma," he says an I smacked his mouth.

"But Ma nothin'. You march yo'self right up those stairs this instant. An dun you think a comin' down here 'afor supper's ready. Now git."

The boy in a pair of dungarees and a t-shirt scooted up the stairs. Strange un, that kid. Of my two sons, he was the brightest and the most promisin', but he sure was strange. Never complained a day in his 'tire life where as my youngest, Smith, was a whiner.

"Momma! Dat rain! It's comin' in da door!" Smith's voice called me from the edge of the stairs. The light front door had dun blowed itself open and the rain was a rushing inside. I flew over and slammed it shut.

"Ain't nuff it's hotter 'an Hades. Gotta rain on my rugs too." I turned to my son. "It's alright baby. We're safe in this house."

"No we're not."

His matter o' fact tone dun shocked me.

"Well we most certainly are! Don't you git upset sweetie."

"No Momma, we're not safe. Murphy say we ain't safe with that man es..es..escaped yesterday."

"Has Murphy been tellin' the 'lunatic dun come ta gitya' story 'gain?" Smith nodded and I pulled him to my breast.

"He says when it rains they all come out an git whoever they find. They won't git us will they? Dem lunatics?"

I laughed and squeezed my son.

"Come on. Let's you an me go see what we're makin' Daddy for supper."

Smith trailed after me into the kitchen and we went about our normal battle about what ta eat. Chicken, I would say, and Smith would shake his head. Hot dogs, he would say and I would argue for the chicken. Finally, when we had decided we would have chicken, I glanced up at the clock.

"Go wash up, Daddy'll be home soon."

"No he won't."

I glanced up to find Murphy had been standin' in the doorway.

"What are you talking 'bout?"

"Dad is not coming home, not tonight, not ever."

"Murphy Anderson don't you ever say such morbid things in this house. Smith go wash up. Murphy sit yerself down."

Smith made a run for the bathroom as I stared at my oldest. A flash caught my eye. From where I was standin', the bay winda by the door was barely visible. Somethin' had just passed it. I gasped and then berated myself. It was only a leaf or a branch or somethin'.

Or someone.

I glanced back at Murphy. Nothin' had moved 'cept his eyes, which were now fixed on the winda.

"Murphy?"

He didn't move.

"Murphy!"

He glanced at me and then turned and fled back up the stairs.

Outside the storm raged, banging boldly on my door 'til it finally kicked it's way in. 'Stead of chasing my son, I chased the raindrops away from my floor as I slammed the door again.

Fifteen minutes found Smith and I settin' in the bay window at the front of the house. Peering through the sheets of rain, we could barely make out the driveway.



Sixteen minutes an I shifted my position for the eighteenth time.

"Momma, where's Daddy?" Smith asked and I dropped my worried eyes to his.

"I dun know sweetie. He's late. It's the rain."

"No Momma, get it through your skull. He's not coming home tonight."

Murphy's voice slapped at me. I turned 'round to find the boy behind me. His blond hair was tussled beyond combing, the almost white eyes were starin' straight at me. He didn't look like a part of this family. Smith was a smaller version of his father, but Murphy....well, who knew what recessive genes he had.

"Murphy why are you saying this?" He stood and gawked at me.

"Murphy answer me."

He shrugged.

"What's for dinner, Momma?"

He turned his back on me and plopped down in front of the T.V.

8 "We might as well eat. Dad's not gonna to make it."

"Momma! Why's he sayin' dat?" I glanced at Smith. He crawled inda my lap and stared up at me, tears cloudin' the beautiful eyes.

"It's alright. Daddy'll be home soon. We'll wait for awhile yet to eat," I said more to Murphy than Smith.

Two hours and we were puttin' the dishes in the machine. The clock on the wall struck nine.

"Dammit Jonathan, where are you?" I slammed my fist into the counter, and it was as if the door heard and understood that I wanted someone to enter. The storm tried again ta fling itself inside my livin' room, but it wouldn't deliver my husband on its winds. Murphy managed to close it this time. The storm seemed to be dyin'. Slowly, but it was dyin'.

"Momma, he's dead."

I stood, shocked stupid for a second. I didn't know what to do with my child. He had

never acted so bad.

"Stop it! Stop sayin' that. Git to bed! NOW!"

He was still standin' there, just a gawkin' at me.

"NOW!"

"Why you love him so much? He's never done shit for you. I've seen him hit you. I've heard you screamin'. Heard you cryin'. I know he's dead Momma. You never have to cry again. Never again. Ain't you happy now? Now that he's gone?"

I stared, gapin' at this boy in front of me.

"You are no son o' mine. Git ta bed fore I paddle ya," I sputtered.

"Mama he's gone! The lunatic dun got him! I know it!"

"Go ta bed."

With that Murphy gave me a glare and marched up them steps. I somehow made my way ta the couch and thought about what Murphy had just confessed. And I thought about Murphy. The boy seemed to think himself more a man than he should. He seemed to think his father was gone, he thought himself the head of the house. Smith climbed up next to me and I clutched him and prayed.

Four more hours and Smith was in bed. I was dozin' on the couch watchin' the late news. Every so often the door would swing open 'til I finally had ta bolt it.

"Man aged...escaped from... asylum...and is said....still in the....of Blue Lake....Residents....warned to be on...for a man....tattoo over right elbow and very large feet. Seems strange folks, but they are unusually large feet. The man may be armed and is very dangerous. Please stay indoors and tuned to CBS for further news."

I flicked off the broadcast and shuddered. I didn't like the fact that the door came open so easy, and I was 'fraid. Jonathan would be home soon. He had ta be. I shut my eyes, and before I knew it, I was sound asleep.

I woke to a breeze blowin' 'cross my

feet and the rest of my body shiverin' uncontrollably. I rubbed my eyes and glanced at the clock. I had been asleep for two hours, and the clock had just struck three. I glanced around, wonderin' where the breeze was comin' from. The door had somehow come open again. I got up, mumblin' as I did so.

"Goddamn locks won't even keep the rain out. Shee-it." It took my tired body a little longer to fight the wind than before but I finally managed ta close the door. It never occurred ta me that the locks on the door weren't damaged. Someone had opened it this time. Someone on the inside. I turned and leaned against it, laughing at the movie star picture it drew in my head.

Something caught the light on the floor.  
Silver. And small.

I crossed to the thing quickly, my heart picking up a beat every step. I crouched and examined it.

A ring.

A weddin' ring.

That matched the one on my finger.

"Jonathan?" I asked into the house. There was no answer. I stood and glanced around. The rest of the floor was wet.

"Momma?" Murphy drew my attention away from the floor.

"Go to bed honey, go now."

"I think I saw dat guy from T.V., dat lunatic? He's hidin' out in the tree. Smith will get scairt if he sees him."

I choked.

"Go to bed honey, Daddy's home, he's just in the kitchen. You were dreamin'." Murphy turned and went to his room, rubbing his eyes. I stood staring at the air he had vacated, wondering if I should look anywhere else. Like the tree.

I opened the front door and ventured out on the porch. The rain had let up some, but the wind was a tryin' to rape me. I looked out at the tree, and then stepped off the porch.

Nothin'.

There was nothin' in the tree at least. The driveway, however, was a sight. I let out a gasp as I looked at the car. My husband's car,

and the driver side door was ajar. And three feet away lay my husband, face up on the gravel.

"Jonathan!" I cried and rushed to his side. Open eyes stared at me. The rain pelted those eyes, makin' it look like he was cryin'. I screamed and run back to the house fast as I could. I pressed my body against the front door and sobbed.

And screamed again.

There on the floor, imprinted on the carpet, and standin' alone on the hard wood, these were the biggest I ever did see, these 'uns were.

And the feets that made these footprints now stood in my kitchen door.

Laughin'.

## VICARIOUS REBIRTH

Sweetness melts  
upon the eyes  
of naive humanity  
at the birth of a  
personal savior.  
lost but two years before  
in the red shadow of my  
two sister suns  
we raised  
our eyes  
to the new white light  
born to preserve  
the last of our youth.  
warming.  
its  
chaste figure  
graces  
the walls  
within  
with  
laughter

SUSAN KOVALESKI



# BLACKNESS

ERIC RIVIERA

*There's a knock at the door in a quaint, brightly-lit home. The living space is well-furnished, but barren of all human life. Not a sound for the next few seconds. . . time being a little longer than bearable for any natural human response. . .*

*Another knock, same as last. It echoes through the space to be received by total silence, stillness . . . the audience doubting if there's any real actors in the whole play. . .*

*Finally, we hear the energetic pounding of footsteps coming around the second floor and down the steps. Jimmy, age three, runs from off stage to the door. He looks through the curtain of the door window and acknowledges the presence of someone we haven't seen yet. He starts to fumble with the doorknob, but is having a lot of trouble—his tiny hands are just barely able to turn the knob, nevermind actually getting the door open. . .*

*The person behind the door seems to sense that the child is having trouble and opens it himself. The Stranger is about sixty or seventy, his stature giving a powerful impression. He has a long, white beard hanging down to his chest, a dark-grey fedora, a dark-grey overcoat, and a black suit underneath. He comes in carrying a large, black bag, bending down to talk to the boy.*

STRANGER: Jimmy, your father is dead. . . Go upstairs right now and tell your mother that your father is dead.

11

*The boy doesn't react. He stands there for a moment staring at the Stranger. He eventually turns around and runs back the way he came.*

*Now alone, the Stranger starts to move around the house with a subtle sense of purpose. He puts down the bag, takes off his overcoat and jacket and places them on the rack. There are about three lights in the room which he proceeds to turn off one by one. He rolls up his sleeves and takes painting supplies out of the bag. Using a roller, he goes to the main wall and paints it black, taking down family pictures as he goes across.*

*The mother enters, holding Jimmy's hand. She is in tremendous shock.*

MOTHER: Is. . .um. . .is it true?

STRANGER: Yes, Mrs. Ripfield. Your husband is dead.

*Beat.*

MOTHER: Well, um. . .how did he die?

*The stranger stops his work and puts down the brush. He goes over to the mother and gives her a hug. She cries uncontrollably onto his shoulder.*

STRANGER: You have to understand that you will never see him again, Mrs. Ripfield. You have to understand that though you've loved one another, it is inevitable that we all must die, and any love you have for the dead is wasted in the wind.



*Beat*

One day, you'll feel stronger. . .

MOTHER:           Who are you?

*The Stranger releases her and goes back to painting.*

STRANGER:        I doubt that matters much now. . .

*Beat*

MOTHER:           But, I, I don't understand. What are you doing? Why are you painting my walls?

*The Stranger takes out some brushes and paint cans and hands them to the mother and son. Jimmy dips the brush and runs upstairs.*

STRANGER:        We have a lot of work to do. Better that we start now.

MOTHER:           No! I won't let you do this! I don't even know you! What do the walls have to do with my husband?

12 STRANGER:        Not just the walls, Mrs. Ripfield. The tables. . .the chairs. . .the appliances . . .the rugs. . .the floors. . .

*Jimmy runs in chasing a white cat with his brush.*

STRANGER:        . . .Everything. . .

MOTHER:           But this is MY HOUSE! I still have to live here! You can't just come in here and decide to paint everything black! It's not right! It doesn't make any sense! I won't let you do it!

*(as he hugs her again)*

You CAN'T! You can't! You can't! You. . .

STRANGER:        Shhh. Shhhhh. . .You're going to feel pain. You're going to feel empty. And you can't tell me what I can and cannot do. He's gone, Mrs. Ripfield. No force on earth can change that fact. And the sooner we start the work the sooner the work will be finished.

*(wiping the tears from her eyes)*

OK?

*He goes back to work on the wall. Jimmy is already painting the door. The mother looks at the two of them. Slowly her eyes go to the brush and can in her hands. Softly sobbing, the mother goes over to the couch and starts to paint it black.*

*The Stranger notices that there is still a considerable amount of light coming in from the window. He paints it black, squeezing the light out of existence. As he does so, the stage lights slowly start to fade to black. . .*

END

## VIOLENT MOMENT

we fall apart.  
I unfold from your arms  
while thunder rolls  
over the autumn bones  
of distant mountains.

*I*

Snow smothers the heavy  
breath of my thoughts  
deep beneath white.

*can*

Daylight falls and lifts across hillsides  
like the imprint of a tank tread -  
light and dark and light...

*feel*

Rain crashes into the river,  
slashes open the hill's cheek,  
and is dabbed up again -  
rain to river to rain...

*time's*

Wind rushes in and out,  
shakes budding branches awake  
slaps with frenzied swings -  
east then west then east...

*violent*

We stretch against each other  
pushing arms and legs around  
as the ground's shoulders shift  
crushing rocks against one another  
in deep, heated caverns.

*movement.*

we fall apart.  
I unfold from your arms  
while thunder rolls  
over the autumn bones  
of distant mountains.

ED MCGINNIS

## UNSUSPECTING

TARAH TRIVELPIECE

The fire licking at my soul makes me wonder. I see him. He smiles. The words unspoken, but the idea understood. He pulls me close and rearranges our legs till I am where he wants me. He asks, "Who are you?" I laugh and feel a twinge of regret, but the regret disappears into a figment of a once felt emotion.

My mind racing, what about his roommate? (I dated him awhile ago and things really never ended.) What will the other two unsuspecting people in this mess think?

14 I feel his breath on my face and the warm moistness of his tongue. I taste the mirage of stale beer, iced tea, salt, and partial morning muck once his tongue finds mine. Nothing seems important now except the presence of his body near mine. None of this will matter tomorrow. I feel his passion rise up from him. His heart quickens.

Now a dull flicker like an image blurred on a wall flashes against my mind. The unsuspecting part of this game leaves as it came and I hold onto only my slight fear of losing. Again I am moved so he is comfortable. Now I am not comfortable...but I don't choose to rebel. All my strength has left my body. All that remains is the flickering image of what comes next. He is kissing me again. My mind tells me this is all so very wrong but can find no reason in the corners of my brain to stop. My heart is past quitting this too real game.

All there is...is him...the smell of worn off after shave, the saltiness of his kisses, the beat of his heart next to my body. While my mind and body search the corridors of experience a reason to end the game appears.

In a musty, choked whisper I manage to mouth, "What about Jake?" In an instant the game ends. I pass the test of loyalty.

Somehow, throughout it all, we remain friends.

## PLAYING THE GAME

inspired by MGhi

The way of the world sucks, leeching red  
platelets to the surface in a feeding frenzy  
of conforming feigned harmony.  
Expunged we shuffle, sallow and anemic.

The way of the world liquefies you taking every unique  
preciousness and single beauty blending them to create  
your reality. And as we gel in the mold, cloned unidentifiably,  
the varied ingredients always yield identical.

The way of the world drains every memory and replaces  
the whole with clear clouded liquid. Painted faces  
dressed in their finest are sealed struggling within a nightmare.  
And we have richly lost walking, playing the game.

TIM WILLIAMS



## WHAT SHE HEARS IN HER HEAD

Go on, cover your face  
They all know why you're here  
Your ghostly countenance speaks for itself  
*Trying to hide it doesn't make it go away...*

Smile when he greets you  
He may be a stranger but he won't hurt you  
Be complete and concise with your answers  
Follow his instructions— *it will be okay*

Strip from the waist down  
*Set your dignity on the chair along with your  
jeans*  
*You may as well throw it away—you won't need  
it*

Stop shaking you childish wench  
This is the price you pay

16

*Ignore the pressure between your legs  
Be indifferent to the surroundings  
The pain you feel as he's poking your insides  
Push it into the reservoir of your mind*

You're cold—you're trembling  
*You're such a child—if you only knew*  
Do you want your mother to hold your  
hand?  
No—you *just want to die*

If you quit shuddering you can dress  
*Where is your dignity?  
It looks like it's disappeared*

Tears are welling in your eyes  
*Dry them—you don't want to draw any  
attention*

Good girl—you listen so well

Scream once more before you walk in the  
house

Make believe you're happy  
The actress is receiving her cue

*Degraded, dehumanized*  
You feel so empty  
Vomit the vile out of your soul  
Wash away the foul feeling of his poking—  
prodding

Now how do you feel?  
*The same—dirty, violated, raped*  
You're still the same little girl  
That left the house earlier

Go on, look at yourself  
Take one hard look at your reflection  
What do you see?—*a shadow of who you once  
were*

Every shred of dignity  
Every ounce of respect  
You once had for yourself is gone!

You foolish little bitch  
You always have to learn the hard way  
bury this deep in your memory  
*With all of the other hurt*

Go on, cover your face  
You know why you were there  
*Trying to hide it doesn't make it go away...*

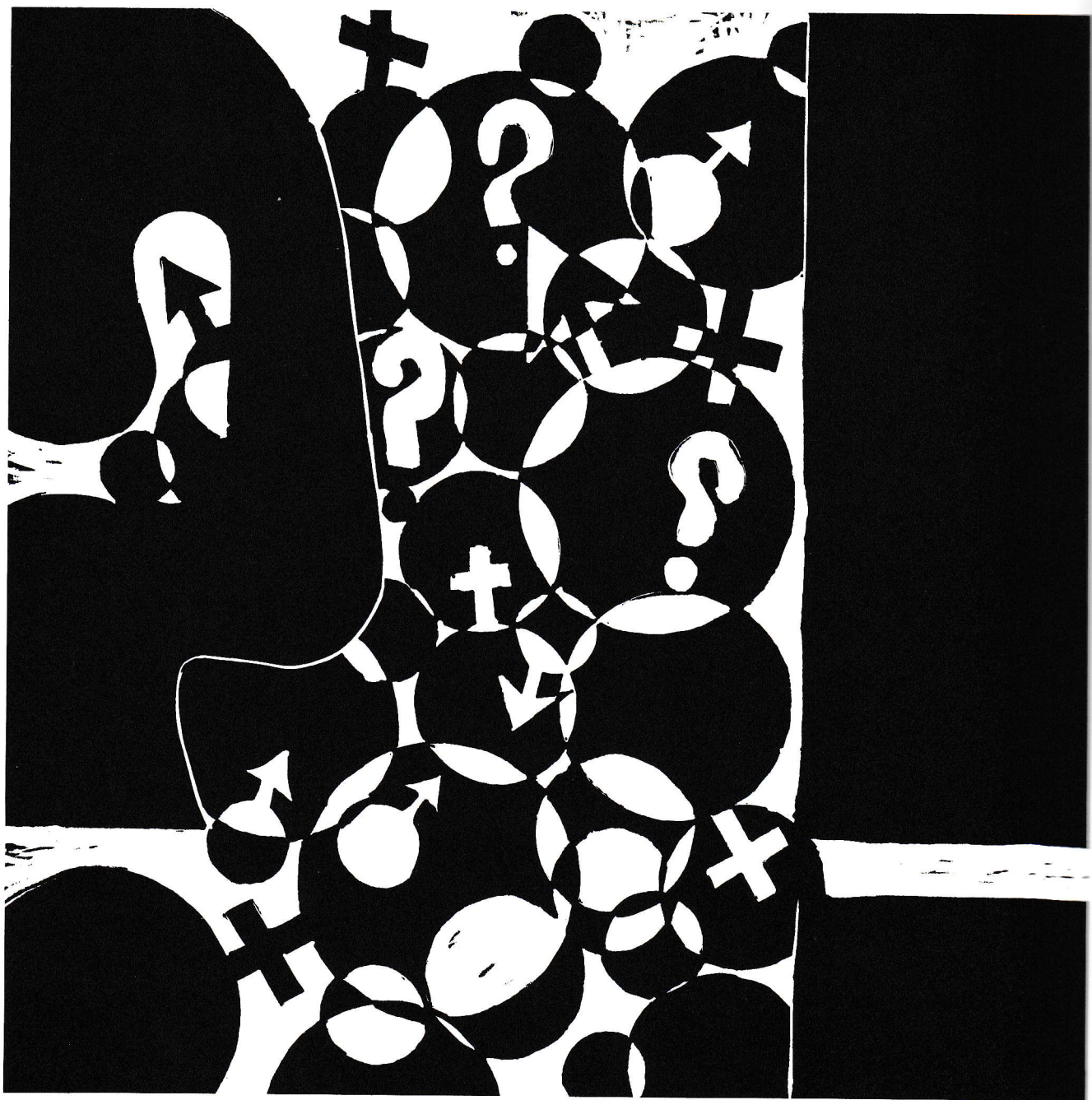
HOLLY JONES

## "FOR CRYING OUT LOUD"

playing with  
dusty sunlight,  
sneezing away  
memories,  
it shouldn't have  
but it did  
break  
the  
window  
pain

visions of the past  
etched into  
the shattered glass

SUSAN KOVALESKI

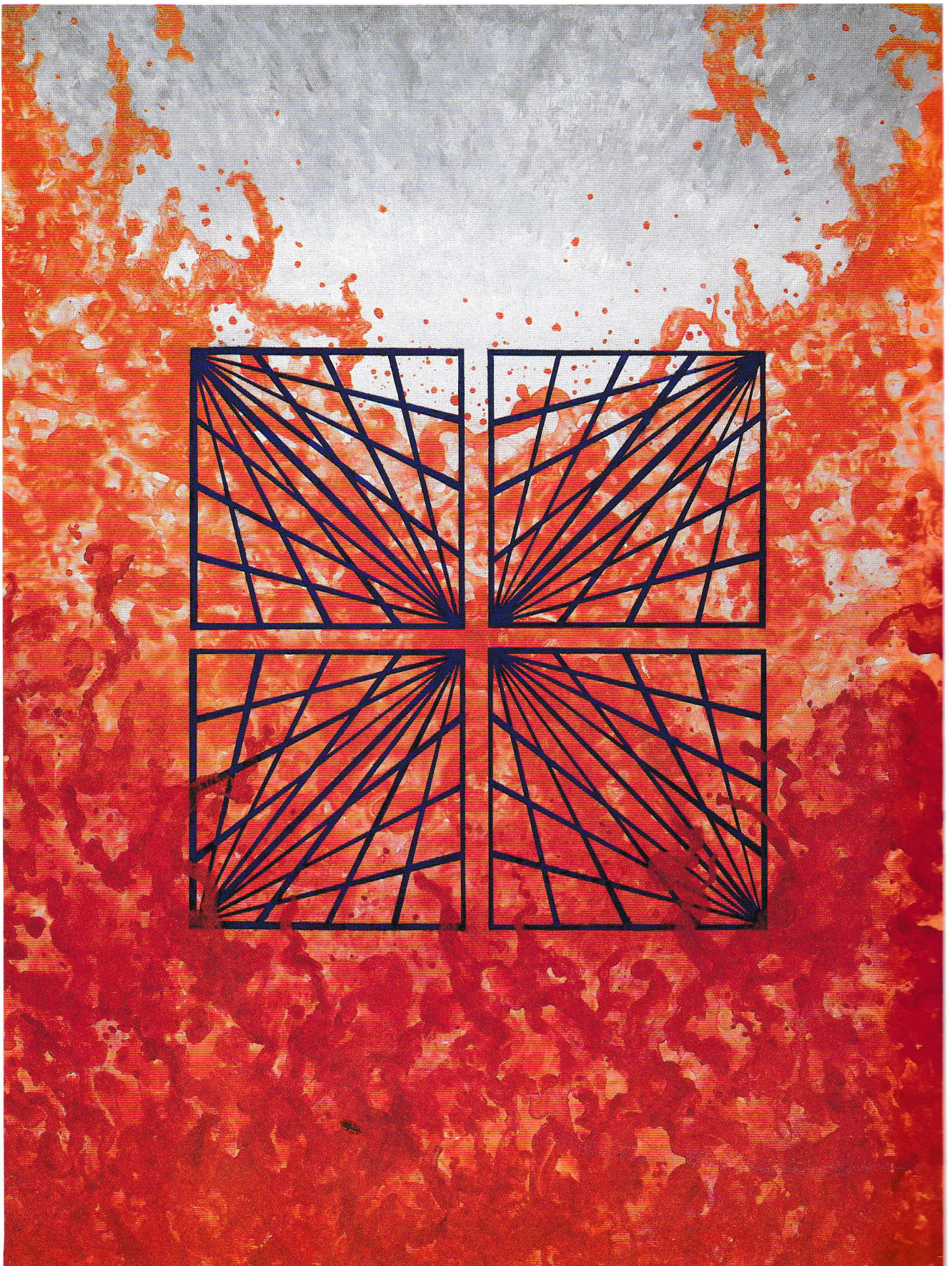


DECISIONS  
AMY BLEASE









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ROBERT WITTMAN





21

CHANGES

AMY BLEASE

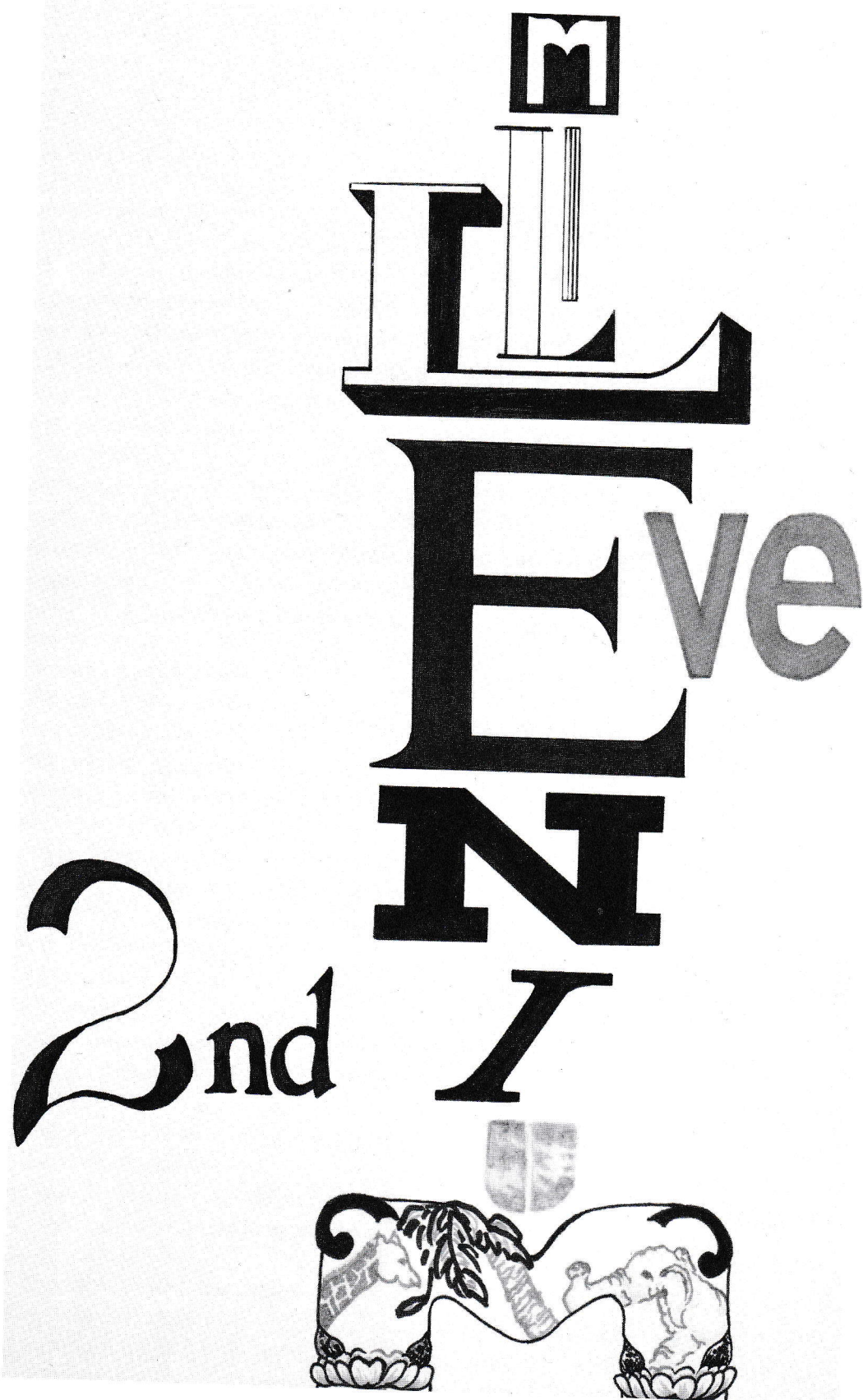




UNTITLED

HENRY BISCO





EVE OF THE SECOND MILLENIUM

DONNA BYTHEWAY

The smoke filtering through the doorway takes my mind back to past entrapments. Remembering. My eyes are covered with the blinders of the past.

I have spent too much time in the old caverns of my mind, looking for what to do next. But the future holds not even enough to conjure an image of togetherness. I know that image was here, I'm absolutely SURE it was...

I don't know where it went. I never will, I guess?

Damn, it's back. I can't stand this. This blinding pain that keeps catching up with me. WHY...why can't it stay where it was...in the past!

Fuck, here...blackness ...in through the murky fog it floats...love, lust, needs, men, all the dancing images of eternal mastering ideas.

Over...light seeps back in...as he rolls over to kiss me before getting out of bed.

**TARAH TRIVELPIECE**



# LAZURUS AND THE BUTCHER

BERNIE KOVACS

Walking home through the poorly lit city streets, dodging traffic and muggers, Lazurus felt the hair on the nape of his neck stand on end, almost as if someone had run a small electric current through his system. Every part of his body was tingling. He sucked in a deep breath and looked around. Nothing. No scents tickled his hypersensitive nostrils, no human sweat ran across his taste buds. No thing breathed in the small alley in which he now stood.

Out there, he thought, was something unheard, something unseen, and unscented; something violent and base. He could feel primal urges boiling like bile in his throat. As his head began to throb with the blood of a dead man, he felt as though he might vomit. Lazarus leaned against the sticky brick wall and coughed once to break the silence surrounding him.

Something was wrong here.

He scanned the alley for a second time, his eyes cutting through its dark bowel as easily as a cat's. His stomach was churning and he felt dizzy. What could make him feel like this? He felt the thirst, red hot in his throat, a beast ready to take control of the mortal coil.

"Jesus," he muttered, his face flushing with another man's blood. Something out there was trying to enrage him, send him over the edge. The urge to go berserk was so strong, he had to bite his lip to restrain himself.

As he released his lower lip with a growl, blood arched through the air. His canines stood crimson in his mouth, far longer than those of a normal man. They gleamed a wicked ivory in the half light of the moon, and his tongue licked the blood they had released as they elongated. He was ready to explode. Every nerve in his body was tingling as if on fire. The blood was coming close to the surface as he started to sweat. He saw stars explode before his eyes as he strove to fight off the hunger. He was ravenous with thirst, his throat burning white hot.

"Stop it," he choked. Lazurus fell to his knees in the slime covered alley and cupped his hand over his face. Sweat was breaking out in beads all over his body, a sticky crimson. He let out a dull moan and pulled himself to his feet, eyes closed.

He heard a can clatter off the wall beside him and opened his eyes. The hunger suddenly fled with the speed of Hermes.

A man of husky build and medium height stood

before Lazurus, hands deep in the pockets of his black jeans.

"Johnathan!" Lazurus staggered back as if hit by a physical blow, eyes wide with horror. Everything else suddenly faded as he bumped against a garbage dumpster. His bottom lip quivered with fear as he looked into the forbidding almost yellow eyes of his adversary.

He was a sly looking man with eyes of pale amber. His hair, the color of a raven's plumage, was slicked back to reveal a long scar that ran from just above his left eyebrow to the left corner of his forehead. The long puckered wound was a pale pink, a contrast to his almost marble like skin. It had the same creamy white pigment as Lazurus' own flesh, but seemed somehow more rigid.

His face was like that of a wolf, a picture of angles and points. The man's eyes were set deep in his gaunt face and his cheeks were sunken. He had only one large thick eyebrow that was now forked in a V, giving his already malevolent looking face a more wicked cast. A large white mouth encased pearly white teeth.

He wore plain black jeans and a bedraggled pair of Reeboks. His well muscled chest was visible beneath the tight grey t-shirt he wore. A chain with an anarchy symbol dangled from his neck. And when he smiled he looked like the devil himself made flesh, pure spite and malice. Yet he had a certain beauty and charm about him. He was dark as night, and just as beautiful—a genuine incarnation of sin.

"Hello, Lazurus," he said, his voice deep and resounding. When he spoke his eyes seemed to bore even further into Lazurus' being.

Lazurus stood up against the dumpster for a few seconds, stunned. His jaw worked frantically but without effect. He closed his eyes tightly and then opened them again, hoping to dispel the illusion before him, but Johnathan was still there.

Then Lazurus acted.

"YOU SON OF A BITCH!" Lazurus howled, his every fiber shaking with rage. The man who had torn down his soul now stood before him, smiling like a coyote. Lazurus planted his feet firmly and felt a sharp pain explode in his fingers as claws sprouted from unforgiving flesh. "You bastard," he groaned, eyes gleaming red in the half light. As he spoke his accent grew more pronounced.

"I'll have thy head," Lazurus snarled. He watched blood spurt from his enemy's mouth and hands as he



popped his claws and readied his teeth.

"Come and get it, coward." Johnathan answered in deep accented English.

Lazurus did.

In a second Lazurus covered the twenty foot gap between them with a one footed leap. He hit his rival like a bullet, hissing like a jungle cat.

The man in black rolled with the attack and regained his footing with speed that belonged only to the Damned.

"Thou art still the fool I left thee, boy," Johnathan growled, coming in with his own attack. Lazurus ducked the swipe and heard claws kiss off the stone. Lazurus hit the shorter man hard in the stomach with his shoulder and knocked him into the opposite wall with a crack of bone and brick.

Blood ran out of Johnathan's mouth as his spine disintegrated. As the spine quickly healed, Johnathan drove a powerful blow into the body of the blond haired warrior. Lazurus fell to all fours and rolled out of the way of a blow that would have broken his back like a twig.

Lazurus came back at the dark clad warrior like a buzzsaw of tooth and claw. They hit each other like two cats, hissing and snarling. Blood and cloth flew as their teeth and claws licked at each other's flesh.

26 Lazurus removed his enemy's side with a swipe that would have cut a mortal in half, yet received a like blow in kind.

The dark warrior fell back bleeding from a plethora of wounds. Lazurus was streaked in blood, his head burning, vision red. All he could see was the man who had torn his life to shreds. He had to destroy him.

Lazurus came back with a high kick. Johnathan easily parried the blow and threw his own low sweeping kick at the blood covered warrior.

Lazurus jumped the lightning fast kick and drove his knee into his opponent's head with a reassuring crack of bone. The man staggered back and came in again, blood streaming from his shattered forehead. Lazurus blocked the left punch and ducked a right that shattered the wall behind him. They were getting nowhere. They could tear into each other all night without end, neither doing the other any real damage. They were evenly matched.

Lazurus saw the same thought in his creator's eyes and knew that the man meant to escape. Lazurus ripped the remains of the man's shirt from him with a swipe of inch long talons to force the Damned man back.

But Johnathan was gone.

Lazurus' keen eyes followed the man's path up the wall. Realizing that he would escape into the night, Lazurus

followed. He scaled the sheer drop like an insect, claws and toes finding minute crevices to force him upwards. He reached the top of the large building in seconds.

His eyes spotted the fleeing form of Johnathan as soon as he climbed over the ledge. Leaping to his feet, he gave chase. Lazurus' lithe form moved with the grace of a bird, jumping objects that lay in his path. He followed the Damned man over a thirty foot space between buildings and kept after him, blood streaming from all pores.

As he raced, Lazurus' temples were hammering. He almost reached Johnathan. Lazurus was barely three feet behind the bastard when he miscalculated a jump and plummeted ten stories to the cold, hard sidewalk below.

Lazurus cursed himself as his face began to reknit. He scrapped his own body from the now scarlet sidewalk and searched the rooftops for any sign of his fleeing adversary. He let out a roar as the realization that he had lost Johnathan set in. He stood in the ragged remains of his clothes, howling like a lunatic. Coming painfully to his sense, he fled from the scene to his home.

Lazurus sat there in his favorite armchair, pondering his painful ten story drop when the phone rang. Startled from his trance-like state, Lazurus took a few seconds to get his bearings before he grabbed the phone from the end table and placed it to his ear.

"Hello?"

"Laz."

"Yes."

"It's Kyle."

"What's wrong?" Lazurus' brow knitted. He checked the clock on the wall. It was only half an hour before sunrise. He was surprised Kyle was not already asleep.

"We've got a big problem," Kyle said.

"I know."

"You do?" Kyle sounded startled.

"Yes."

"Who told you?" Kyle's voice grew more nervous. Lazurus didn't like it.

"No one. I saw Johnathan myself." Lazurus skipped over the fray in the alley.

"Johnathan's here? I didn't know!"

"What were you talking about then?" Lazurus asked, already afraid the answer would be something worse.

"Someone is out there killing the Damned."

It was.

## GRACE

The absolute balance of zero  
like an egg rolling end over end  
on a high wire

or the slinky-like cascade of a dream  
not falling  
but rising on the wings of a thousand  
mile-high butterflies

at any moment there is a flower  
sucking up the sky

a moon whose stillness  
resounds in stillness  
like the skeleton of an unknown pianist  
left marveling at the keys

and all the words any man ever said  
however small  
worlds themselves  
blindly speeding through the cosmos

undisturbed

**BILL RASMOVICZ**

## LOOSENED

Mute morning air  
hums deep  
in content contemplation.

Beyond the window's reflection,  
the sketch of a new Sunday  
is slowly painted in.

My coffee mug,  
wrapped warm in my grip,  
pursed to my lips,  
releases tendrils of steam  
to unfurl  
                          drifting moments  
                          to the ceiling...  
          curled  
in our disheveled sheets,  
you sleep.

**ED MCGINNIS**

It's days like this  
I remember you.  
Not the deeply imbedded  
parts of you inside  
my lining  
but your laugh,  
the thickness of your hair,  
how you ruffled your jacket  
against the cold and  
slid behind the steering wheel.

Cold day cloudy day  
perfect for keeping your body  
here in my head

Never enough  
          I crack you  
          to crawl inside  
and breathe air and blood  
you never realized you had.

**MARISA RAE**



# THE PRIZE INSIDE THE CEREAL BOX

KAREN RUDUSKI

The sun burned bright on a mid-summer day in July. It was Bobby's turn for lunch. He left his cool home on the top of the Hill and descended in search of a meal. Nature sheltered him from the intense heat of the sun, cooling the grass and flowers. He climbed to the tallest point looking desperately for food. Sadly he found everything around him to be vacant, except...

Across the Black-land was a feast to last the entire year. So he was on his way. Bobby ran and skipped, walking quickly when he was tired. Meeting the edge of the Black-land, Bobby halted. In the back of his mind Bobby heard the warnings of dangers of death. He started in retreat obediently, but turned quickly in youthful rebellion to finish his duty.

Placing one foot into the Black-land, Bobby wondered if he would make it. He tried to ignore his fear. He was young, energetic, and indestructible. He knew he would be the bravest boy when he returned home with this feast. He would bring a small cobblestone for proof of his journey, to show when he related the story in his older days. He would have done it once, and once was just enough.

The burning ground made him scurry across the land, using ditches and boulders to hide. In the distance he could see the edge to the other, safer side, the side that would serve for his incredible food supply, and in turn define his reputation as the bravest and most generous boy from the Hill.

He spotted his meal nestled between grass blades, concealed by nature, but identifiable from his direction. He approached the area alert for possible harm and directed his movements toward the feast. He reached it. He struggled with the great weight of the food. Wobbling once or twice and then balancing himself, he set out for home. The bundle on his back was heavy and he knew he would have to walk directly through the Black-land instead of hiding as he did in his first passage. Bobby remembered no problems before so he felt no fear. 29

He began walking steadily across, looking intensely for a cobblestone all the way, finding none small enough for him with the enormous bundle he already carried. Looking down he saw shadows that were massive and engulfing, falling in from overhead. As he went to look for their origin, he became distracted by the perfect cobblestone.

He slowed and stopped to pick it up. After rebalancing himself a second time, he went to continue. Noticing the intensified heat, Bobby felt extremely warm. He threw his concerns aside, attributing his discomfort to a long restless journey. It didn't matter now, Bobby could see the edge of home and soon would be there with his impressive food supply. His travel story would make him a hero and his name would be remembered forever. He was almost home.

He felt hot and tired, more so than before.

Keep going.

The intensity kept getting greater, his body fighting to release the heat. But it was not releasing it fast enough.

Almost there.

Bobby felt dizzy.

Just a little farther.

The sun's rays seemed to be directed entirely on him, strengthening in impact with each passing moment.

Bobby burst into flames, his ashes blending into the Black-land.

*Erik's mother yelled from the house, "What did I tell you about setting ants on fire with that magnifying glass?"*

## "BEST DAMN POPCORN I EVER ATE"

Scary,  
the moment fades  
quickly  
we forget the intensity  
I thought,  
perhaps,  
glimpses of security  
lay in your arms.  
drifting away  
forgetting to wish to forget  
my stomach refuses  
to accept  
& my jaw aches  
remembering.

SUSAN KOVALESKI

30

that sweatshirt of yours that  
wound around my bedpost  
that morning  
swirls and churns  
with my linen trousers  
submerging  
twisting  
washing machine lust  
I have you woven  
in my net of shells  
my thin painting shirt  
is caught  
in your mangle of sleeves  
and my red silk panties  
bleed  
and stain you.

I can't help but laugh  
and yet mourn  
for your pink tangled armor.

MARISA RAE



## THE NIGHTMARE

DEIRDRE SWINDEN

I woke to swollen fingers and sweaty eyelashes. My heart was pounding faster than I could focus. I finally managed to find my voice and scream.

"It's alright, only a dream," I breathed, "only a dream." And that's all it was, though my nose seemed to think it could still smell the disgusting tendrils drifting up the stairs and into my apartment. My lungs still felt the constricting grasp of the smoky fingers they had inhaled. My hair still existed, but I put a hand to my head to check anyway. I always did.

And I always would.

A yipe from across the room drew my attention. In the battle with my sheets my puppy had lost, and he was only a third party. I was surprised he still slept in my bed. This was the fifth time I had tossed him off this week, and it was only Thursday. Correction, judging by the clock it was Friday.

"Come here baby. I'm sorry Jinx. Did I scare you? I gotta cut that out don't I? If I kick you out, what am I gonna do when Michael finally gets his butt across the country, huh?" Jinx crept over and whimpered softly. He snuggled up to my leg, but didn't get comfortable. He knew my nightmare ritual of going to the kitchen to find something to eat.

Once in the kitchen, I fished around the

fridge for something to munch on. All that spoke to me was the leftover macaroni and cheese from dinner. I took it out and stuffed it into the microwave. I wandered over to the fifth floor window and glanced at the sleeping city below. New York never looked as frightening at three-thirty in the morning as it did at rush hour. Just the sleeping lights of a city that someone said didn't sleep. I was beginning to think they were right. I sure as hell couldn't. The street was empty except for the cars parked along the curb. Not a soul in sight. A few hours and it would be safe to go for a walk. Safe, that was a term I didn't reserve for New York. Funny, at the worst possible hours, the city always looked the sanest.

"Well Jinx, maybe it's time we told someone about this? Maybe Mom, or Jackie, although Jackie would just tell me I was losing my marbles and driving her up the wall with all my talk about dreams and never of men. I still love him, and that seems to mean to her that she has to get him off my mind. Dragging me to bars all the time in search of the perfect hunk-o-manhood."

Slurp and Jinx licked my cheek.

"I don't think she should either. Maybe I shouldn't love him, after all, he is in California."



Beep and the macaroni was ready.

"I think if I don't stop having nightmares I'm going to be one very fat, very lonely woman."

Jinx barked.

"Thanks, thanks a lot. Come on, back to the pool."

I checked the clock before I climbed in to the soaked sheets. 3:45. Always the same. Up at 3:00, back in bed at 3:45. I sighed heavily and closed my eyes to lay wide awake for the three hours until my alarm sounded a new morning.

32 "Say what? Honey-girl, you have finally lost your marbles." Jackie turned her brown eyes in my direction.

"I knew you'd say that."

"Girlfriend, you have got to stop dreaming 'bout fires and start makin' some with some incredibly gorgeous hunk-o-manhood. We gotta git us to a bar tonight. Forget that moron in California, he ain't ever gonna git his ass out here to see ya."

Much as she tried, Jackie simply couldn't convert to New York black from Georgia black. Maybe that's why we were friends. We were both a bit lost in a city as big as New York. Two small town sweethearts who had come looking to make it big in the city they called New York. Though I was from the mid-west, Jackie and I had somehow found each other like magnets in the 'fly-infested

waste of the money to get there' dream city. Mike used to warn me about cities. Until now, I had never believed him.

"Honey, it is Friday night... What if Mike calls..."

She cut me off.

"Ladies night and the drinks are half-price! I'll see you at eight- and you best be lookin' good sweetheart." She turned and strutted down the hall.

"Alright, alright. I'll be an alcoholic by the time I find a man but what the hell, it's cool."

"Oooo yeah. We is partyin' TO-NIGHT!" Jackie hollered and laughed and then ducked into her office. I stifled a smile and whirled on my heel to return to my own rathole in New York's advertising business. Not much, but an office and some money seemed pretty big to a small town girl like myself.

And a small town girl I was. I had never seen the airport before the day Michael put me on the plane bound for New York. I remembered that day perfectly. His hands on my head as he promised he'd come visit.

"I'll be there, honest, honey. We'll be fine, don't even worry. Jinx'll be there with you. Remember when we got him?" I had smiled at that memory. The day we had gotten the two room house in the woods. Michael had returned home with the labrador pup.

"So we don't jinx the house against the 'pitter-patter of little feet'," he'd smiled. We'd called him Jinx ever since. A tear had rolled down my cheek at that one and Michael brushed it aside with his thumb.

"Baby, I don't want you to go just as much as you don't, but we need the money. After the fire..." I had shuddered in the past, just as I shuddered at the memory.

"Michael, why can't I get a job here. I want to stay, please..." I had begged. He shushed me with a finger.

"No. We talked about it all before. This is best. When I'm back on my feet we'll be together again. I promise."

"How long?"

"I love you," he'd whispered and kissed me. "And no more bad dreams, okay?"

I had nodded.

"I love you too," and I was back in the present saying the same words to the empty air. I shook the memory from my view and set back to work.

At five I walked from my building to my warehouse apartment. It was roomy and cheap and it was actually in a decent neighborhood. The living/dining/kitchen/work area all ran together with wood floor hiding under a few throw rugs. I bounded up the spiral staircase that led to the bedroom/bathroom. The bathroom was the only part of the apartment that was contained in different

walls. So I had to make my bed if I was having company. I didn't mind. But it was nothing like the house. It didn't have the cozy feel of the two room shack Michael and I had spent all our money on, all our time on. And it was gone. All of it. Burnt to the ground in the same fire that consumed my dreams. Maybe even me if I hadn't heard Jinx whimpering. But it was the past. All the past.

"Jinx!" I yelled and he jumped from my pillow to greet me.

The fire had started in the kitchen and quickly spread to the living room area. I had been outside, getting wood for the fire. Somehow the soup boiled away, maybe I had spent too much time playing fetch with Jinx. We had returned to the house and I was about to open the door when Jinx stepped back and barked. I had watched him. He sniffed the air and barked again. My hand hovered above the doorknob. I shook my head and turned back to the door.

"Crazy mutt," I remember saying. I dropped the wood. I might have...

The blast from the door knocked me off my feet and threw me clear of the house as it folded like a piece of origami.

I shuddered and scratched Jinx behind the ears.

"I'm going out tonight baby. I'll be back to have my nightly fight with the covers and throw you off the bed. If Michael calls you tell him to get his butt out here, okay?" The



dog barked happily and I scratched his ears. Before long it became a wrestling match and soon after time to go.

I stumbled into my room at about two. Drunk as could be.

"Jinx?" I slurred and somewhere he barked. "Come'ereboy!"

He bounded downstairs but didn't jump on me as he normally did.

"Was wron Jinxs? Sumpin' wron bay-BEE?"

He barked.

"Oh, well, you proolly try to tell me Mike called n I dun care."

34 I found my way up the stairs and passed out face down on my bed.

Jinx sat next to the door of the apartment, sniffing the air cautiously and whimpering softly.

Whimpering.

I woke sweating pure alcohol. If I wasn't careful I would catch on fire. My drunken mind was slower to focus tonight and quicker to be afraid. And the smell of smoke seemed to linger longer than it ever had. Then it hit me.

I was hot.

Not just nightmare hot.

I mean *hot*.

"Jinx?" I called into the dark.

Whimpering.

"Jinx!"

A yipe.

"Where are you?"

I stumbled out of bed. I hit the light switch and was plagued with further darkness.

"Shit," I muttered and stupidly flicked the switch a few more times. I stumbled toward the stairs.

And missed the first step.

I remembered the nightmare on the way down. In all its awesome power, the dream had never been so real. The fall. The fire. The screaming, the whimpering. All real.

I saw everything as clearly as the dream I had just finished viewing. Just before my head hit the floor I saw my nightmare. The floor engulfed in a screen of smoke so thick it looked like fog. And the flames that would soon judge the door good enough to devour. And my puppy.

Whimpering.

Whimpering as the fake sunlight showed him my lifeless body, passed out on the floor. Whimpering as the hair on my head began to burn away and the skin on my face start to boil.

And that was all.

I usually woke up at that point. Only this time, I didn't have a choice. I met and married the hard wood floor before I could realize it wasn't a dream.

And it never would be again.



## A BITTER WOMAN

If you licked her tears  
If you licked her face  
her dry smooth arms  
her wet pungent crotch  
You could taste it

It oozes from her pores  
It purrs from her skin  
It drips without a sound  
from her hair  
from her nose when she has a cold  
from her mouth when she is sleeping

It puddles around her feet  
on her pillow  
on her windowsills like condensation  
It grows wildly  
exponentially  
with every passing day

It leaks from her laughter  
from her silent solitary orgasms  
from her cactus her cooking her cracked  
uneven kitchen floor her vacuum  
her shadow  
her prayers.

KAREN ZIAGOS

## THE CONFESSION OF A DAUGHTER OF CAIN

SUSAN KOVALESKI

After your soliloquy, I say to you: "I will always be lonely." Spring equals romance equals bullshit, bullshit, bullshit. "The holy trinity blesses no union with me. I follow the rhythmical patterns of love's false promises, unable to change, just as the rain shattering on the metal hood of the car cannot control its course."

"You owe me no apologies. You could not control your part in my destiny for it was your destiny, too. I will not cry for what I knew we never had. No one loves a loser, and I lost the game long ago....."

Music plays in the silence between us, "All I wanna do is have some fun..." whines Sheryl Crow. You ponder my apparent self-loathing and apathy. There is no other way to express what is reality for me. You are not the first to say those words. There is an honor of brotherhood in refusing to love me. "I won't tell you that you're the only one..."

I tell no friend my heart's secret, I never learned the fragile language of trust. Without trust there is no love. Secrets aren't kept by hearts that love. Misery and silence have been ordained my confidants. Beauty, intelligence, and wit engulf me in your presence; obesity, disfigurement, insanity whisper behind my back. Curiosity kisses in moments of fleeting passion. Reality kisses me goodbye...

36

The veins within you pound with the steady rhythms of love's instrument. My arms ache. "One last time before it's over. One last time and then the end," you beg, not waiting for a response, not noticing the realization on my face. Your lips caress mine into an unwilling response to their demands. You engulf yourself in your final taste of me, I watch us intertwine from a distance. A voyeur to our last act, your last insult for me. You finish first leaving me behind in your wake, as always, I hunger for more but your veins have ceased throbbing. I force my hand to touch you, your throat, trace your jaw, brush the sweat from your temple. I pull you back to me, tilting your throat to my lips. I taste the sweet saltiness of your throat, your blood seeping between my teeth. But these lips still drink wine and I have not the stomach to contain your life, yet it satisfies the hunger lingering within me. "Goodbye sweet innocence," I whisper to you, to me. The blade slices the jugular my teeth could not. I hold you as the life and warmth drain from within your shell, turning the powder blue seats crimson. I watch over you until the spirit tells me to move on.

Going forth into life. Stepping out of the car and into the rain, leaving behind your cooling, stiffening, rotting body. I walk, walk, walk, until I find myself at the master's door. I enter aware I am not welcome at his table. Hiding in a closet knowing it will be years before penance is over, years before life is over, and the torch is passed back, yet the fire has been ignited within me, growing with each step. Opening the window searching for the light.

"Bless me father for I have sinned. It has been a lifetime since my last confession."

## JANUARY FIVE 9 FIVE

Enveloped in the sea  
of mist as each drop melts onto  
every object and seeing is  
not believing when two white eyes  
emerge slowly as you approach  
revealing a phantom engine  
muffled and drowning in the sea  
striving to get out as it plods  
forward suffocating in the flood  
and you stop — better safe than  
sorry she said — but they come  
backwards, frontways, sideways,  
cattycorner still, tired, hot  
and short of breath before  
accepting their place in the sea

TIM WILLIAMS



## BURIAL GROUND

Clouds huddle  
on horizons  
preparing for fury with  
ominous electrifying silence.  
Shattered by the  
collision of wills  
tumbling  
Amid thunderous  
confusion  
music emerges  
skin glistening  
sweet shrill pain  
ground down to drudge  
depths of the soul  
sweating  
bleeding  
all past tears  
pool into  
open graves.

leaving behind  
abandonment  
old baseball bats  
bloody syringes  
the false lovers still cling  
screaming for nudity  
within & without  
begging the burning eyes to  
go beyond surface tension  
dive into liquid pain  
baptized in reality  
salvation comes  
on the heels of  
the storm.

SUSAN KOVALESKI

# RAIN SHOWER

Drip  
Drop Drop  
Drip Drop  
Drip Drip  
Drop Drop  
DripDripDrip  
Drop

Clean

Crisp

Rain

Cool

f u m h  
a p y e  
l o a  
l n d  
s

39

I

Run

I

Skip

I

J u m p

S  
P  
L  
A

S

H

S

P

L

A

S

H

I'm soaked  
Who cares

PATTY PUERLING

## NERIED

Rapidly  
rising above me on the staircase  
pulling me up the staircase  
I try to find the face  
in your yellow  
cascade,  
but each step  
          screams  
under me like the straining high dive plank  
I  
hurtle off  
Weightless we float  
over three last steps,  
laughter drops  
out our lips.

Behind your white skinned door  
still perfume fills  
inhalations  
sharp breaths  
of after rain scents.  
My eyes feel your fingers  
          squeak on  
the loud rush of bathtub water,  
to test its texture  
meticulous nails disappear  
under racing white.

40

Suddenly!  
you are part of the room  
an intimate familiar fixture,  
your scene  
should not include me,  
I  
could push away,  
push away right now,  
before being caught  
like a water drop  
tossed gasping on  
to some  
hard, flat sun  
warm  
rock.  
But black fingers roll around me  
snuff every sound around the city  
and an emptiness splashes inside your  
house,  
fills every corner with lack of presence,  
extinguishes everything  
except this room.

This room is wet with steam  
and my clothes cling close  
and the white walls are close  
and everything is so close

there is no room in this room  
until your eyes  
pierce my eyes,  
hook my skull,  
pull me  
back  
where wide oceans lull.

A lazy rain, your eyes drift down.

Your first blouse button  
slips out  
of its eyelet,  
a bright silver coin  
sinking  
deep into  
a silk blue pool  
plunk.

plunk.

plunk.

plunk.

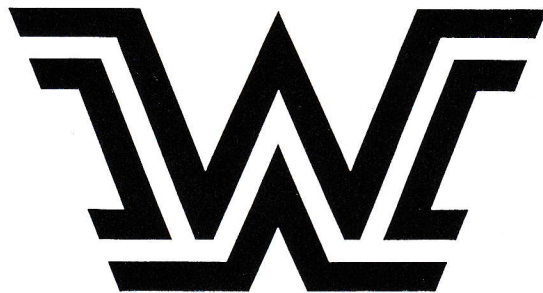
I reflect your undressing  
watch you  
watch me  
watch you stripping  
    a long weathered sand,  
pale and tan,       smoothed  
    neck                   by  
    shoulders            the  
    breasts               wind.  
    belly  
    thighs  
    one leg  
enters the bath water,  
steam  
flows up your body  
you kneel  
water  
glistens your light curls

I enter your element  
submerge in heat  
as an ancient wave draws way up to  
    spill its shadow on me one suspended  
                                  instant before you

crash into my chest to suck down our  
senses.

ED MCGINNIS





**WILKES UNIVERSITY**  
**MANUSCRIPT**