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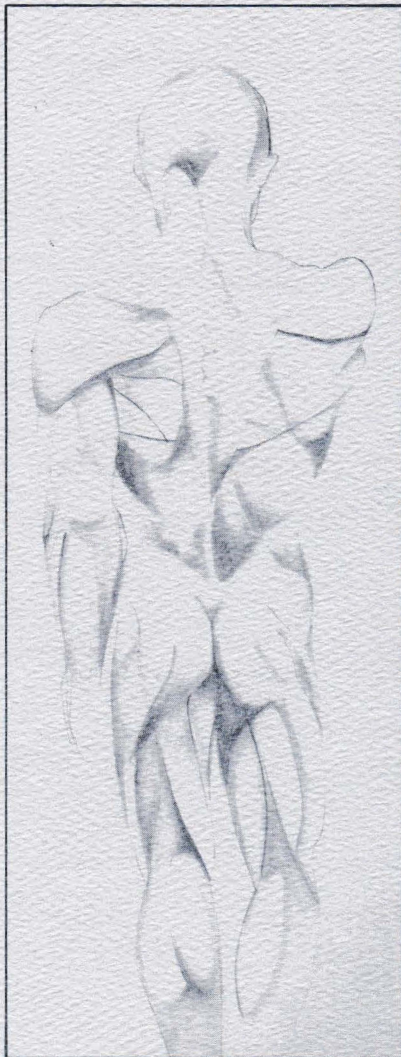
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MISCARRIAGE

You thought there would be more, I guess,
 as you carry your baby, dead
 in a jar to a knife-white room
 where antiseptic voices
 clip it's nature's way of doing away with
 what isn't perfect, anyway,
 but you would have wanted him still, I know.
 Any Way.
 And didn't you think there would be more?

I did
 and sometimes, Erin, I pull out the cardboard boxes of your words,
 read of a you I didn't know, then. . .and I wait for more. . .
 A sister shadow black and rich,
 you'd come home from the city, lugging crisp fragrant bags of bagels,
 cinnamon and sour-dough soaked in New York uncertainty,
 battered tablets with swirled charcoal covers.
 You smelled musty, damp—like a book forgotten in the rain.
 You were sweet leather
 and thrift store stale with a shivering giggle that shriveled your
 sophistication.

Cardboxes of your words, slashed reckless in the
 tea-stained pages of a notebook. . .you almost lived.
 Every glaring word promised breath, writhed with near-aliveness.
 Then. . .Mute. . .when you were just beginning
 to peel away skin that smothered,
 because you thought no one would hear what was imperfect. . .
 But I would have listened, still,
 Any Way.

From the unbearable swell of what trembled life,
 you delivered an almost birth. I can't console you,
 in its shadow,
 but only watch
 while you reel, like a deer in the road,
 a bewildered ballerina,
 watch,
 while you touch to sleep the petal child mouth
 whose breath you could almost feel
 inside of you.

SAM

I could sail
the river
with you.
I could
depend
on you to
protect me
from Indians,
bears . . .
myself.
Family —
and friends —
pushed overboard,
stuck in the
mire
and left
behind.
Floating down
the Mississippi
like
Huck and Jim,
together,
we could
save
the world . . .
. . . for a day.

Michele Broton

4 THE TASTE OF WINE IN A GILDED CUP

Look upon your life, my boy,
In ways you have not done,
With simple joys the pinnacle
And pleasure, number one.

Look upon the world with eyes
That see the beauty true.
Fields and flowers matter more
Than constitutions do.

The taste of wine in a gilded cup,
The ardent smell of trees,
Taste the spice of carefree life,
Sweet honey from the bees!

So look no more to rules by which
To limit living's cheers;
Take your soul to a paradise
That lasts a thousand years.

Paul Winarski

WE ALL LOOK DIFFERENT FROM UPSIDE DOWN

In some western town, a child
hangs upside down by his knees
from monkey bars just
across the street from a gallows
which is the center of attention today.
The child hangs watching a hanging.
The man to be hanged waits,
staring at the child, and both
are momentarily amazed at the other's position,
but when the floor drops out,
the man's neck snaps leaving
a terminal frown on the citizens,
but nothing except smiles to the small upside down boy.

Jim Dee



MOM, DAD, AND THE MONSTER IN THE CLOSET

CHRIS WENT RUNNING DOWN THE HALL YELLING FOR DADDY, AND HE KNEW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN.

What would happen was that he would tell his dad that he had seen a monster coming out of his closet and then Daddy would whack his eight-year-old across the cheek in an attempt to drill in the importance of not having an overactive imagination and not waking Father up in the middle of the night.

But that didn't stop Chris from running down the hall, yelling for his daddy.

Dad was a worker at the local bottling factory where he put in eight hard hours a day only to come home to a wife who was too busy gossiping with the neighbors to keep an eye on dinner. That meant burnt roasts.

That meant arguments. That meant flying dishes. And that meant, somehow or another, Chris would end up getting bruises from one of his parents or maybe both. It was simply a matter of who caught him doing something wrong first.

Mom worked all day too—she worked at watching the soaps on afternoon television. Also, she invited guys over and they'd work upstairs in the bedroom while Daddy was at the bottling factory. Chris had always thought it strange that his mother would give him a crack just for looking at her, so he kept his mouth shut about mom's work. Besides, he didn't understand the adult world anyhow.

But that was okay because his parents didn't understand his world, either. And Chris was smart enough to realize this so he knew that

Mom and Dad certainly would not believe he had seen a monster coming out of his closet.

But he ran down the hall screaming for his daddy anyway.

When he reached the door to his parents' bedroom, at the other end of the long hall, Chris's father appeared. He was dressed in loose pajamas and looked very annoyed.

Daddy was tall and strong. Forget his beer belly; he could still rip the arms off his eight-year-old son (in fact he had tried one evening, an experiment that had resulted in a trip to the emergency room for the young boy and the spinning of a tale about tricky stairs and violent falls).

Chris stopped in front of his angry-looking father and pointed, with one arm and a stretched finger, back up the hall towards his bedroom.

"Daddy, a big green wart-covered monster came out of my closet! I think it wants to eat me!"

Mom's voice, cranky and cigarette scarred, came from inside the bedroom, "What the hell! Monsters!? Go to bed, Chris, now!"

"Okay, son," his dad said in a quiet voice which was scarier than when he was loud. "We're gonna check it out. If there is a monster, Dad'll take care of him. If there isn't, Dad's gonna take care of you."

Chris knew what that meant, but it didn't matter.

Father and son trotted back up the hall and into Chris's room. Here there was a tiny bed, a night table with a Mickey Mouse alarm clock,

and a small dresser. On the other side of the room was the closet—door closed, no sign of monsters.

"It must've gone back in, Daddy!"

With a frown, Daddy went over and opened the closet door.

Two muscular green arms, sporting razor-like talons, reached out and grabbed him. Daddy got a brief glimpse into the red eyes of a creature that looked as if it were a cross breed between a gorilla and The Creature from the Black Lagoon. Then its powerful jaws opened and engulfed Dad's head, muffling the weak, wimpy whimper that was his idea of a scream of terror.

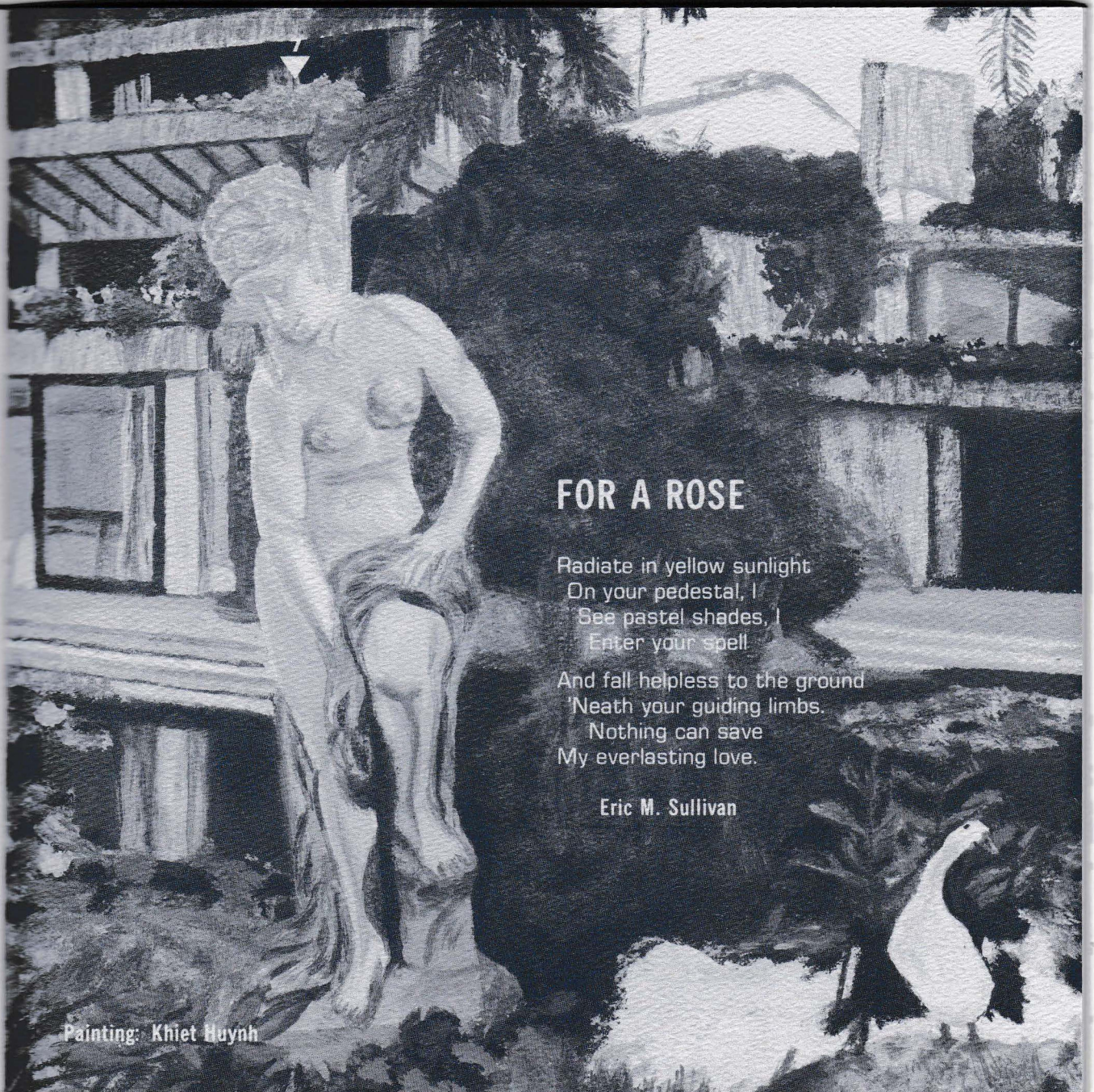
Chris walked over to the creature. It was very big and strong: Daddy had never stood a chance.

The eight-year-old patted it on the head while it feasted on Pop, taking the limp body in with quick gulping gasps and not bothering to chew at all.

Chris noticed that the book with the six-pointed star on the cover, the one he had picked up from the old part of the public library last week, was sticking out from underneath his bed. He bent over and pushed it back under, allowing his race-car bedspread to drape down to the floor once again.

Chris went running down the hall yelling for Mommy, and he knew what was going to happen.

Tony DeCosmo



FOR A ROSE

Radiate in yellow sunlight
On your pedestal, I
See pastel shades, I
Enter your spell

And fall helpless to the ground
'Neath your guiding limbs.
Nothing can save
My everlasting love.

Eric M. Sullivan

Painting: Khiet Huynh

ADIRONDACK LAKE

Wake with the sun over a misty lake.
The fog rises from a glassy surface.
The calm night yields to morning songbirds;
A loon, rarely seen, sings out from the fog.

A cool spring empties into the vast lake;
Trout swim beneath the cascading coolness.
A red-tailed hawk rises on thermals,
Quiet, effortless, higher and higher.

Tall reeds in a cove conceal movement;
White-tail deer feed at the water's edge.
A late day calmness settles in the air;
Golden ripples reflect the bright sunlight.

Twilight yellow sky falls on shadowed hills.
One by one, stars illuminate the sky.

Eric M. Sullivan

EARLY MORNING ON RAQUETTE LAKE

My eyelids crack and the first images
of morning are seen.
Out the window, fog shrouds the glassy
surface of the lake.
A pair of wood ducks swim quietly by,
magnificent, brilliant in their colorful plumage
and stately presence.
Quickly I scurry to find warm clothes
and step outside.
The chill of misty air is refreshing.
Dew-covered grass sparkles in the sunlight.
I walk on to the dock, pause
as the two wood ducks watch me.
For we have met before.
My eyes water and body tingles
as I soak up this moment.
The fog soon lifts, and this serene
early morning fades to day,
no less beautiful as the opposite shore comes to view
but it can not compare to the early morning on Raquette Lake.

Eric M. Sullivan

THE BLUEBIRD AND THE PINE

Gentle bluebird,
 Your presence is sweet, refreshing.
 Embodiment of innocence and beauty,
 I offer you shelter
 from the rain and
 the comfort of home,
 All my life can give.

Not as tall as the other pines,
 but my character is true.
 My branches reach for you, inviting.
 You fly past, teasing my sincerity,
 But you return and fill my void,
 Staying briefly, flying off
 to the nest you built
 in another tree.

I lament your absence,
 living for the moments
 when you're with me.

Eric M. Sullivan

SPRING IN ALASKA

Upheaval of dirt,
 warmth through the frost;
 freedom for flowers.

Thick brown mud clings,
 thickens in layers
 to old Sorels.

Puddles fill and grow,
 flowing easily along
 into the street.

The sand of safe roads,
 remaining behind the snow,
 runs finally off.

If frost and rain,
 mud and sand mix,
 it's spring in Alaska.

R. G. Haywood

MIDNIGHT DREAMS

The star called to me . . .

it was not great,
 nor immensely
 bright . . .

But in calling me . . .
 it shone truer than
 all the rest.

Michele Broton



PICTURES IN MY MIND

Blue is the sky
That floats in my mind
Black is my sky at night
Dreams drift freely
Lost in time
Some distant
But none out of sight.

Vito Quaglia

WATCH ME BLEED

Why do they taunt me
Because I am not the same?
Do they really expect me
To play their foolish game?
I don't know if I should rise above
Or drop down to their speed,
But being me isn't good enough —
They'd love to watch me bleed.

I expose myself and open wide
All my feelings and emotions,
But they laugh at what I have inside,
They can't feel my devotion.
I wish for once they would listen,
Respect is all I need,
But instead they keep on cutting —
And still they watch me bleed.

Vito Quaglia

THE ORPHAN

Mother, can you hear me?
I call for you
at midnight,
when the night-beasts
haunt my sleep.

Mother, can you see me?
brown eyes,
sad eyes,
turning blue.

Mother, can you feel me?
flesh of my flesh,
blended bloods,
my life . . .
your life . . .
ours?

Mother, do you need me?
when age has
turned you gray and
lonely, all alone?

Mother, can you touch me?
warm hands,
cold hands,
empty,
growing colder.

Mother, do you know me?
I've grown up,
gone to college,
would you
recognize me now?

Mother, do you love me?
born of body,
yet thrust away.

Mother, can I love you?
never a chance
to know.

Chelemi

THE HUNT FOR MANHOOD

THE CANDLES HAD LONG SINCE BEEN BLOWN OUT AND LITTLE VANESSA, MY COUSIN WHO HAD JUST TURNED SEVEN, SCURRIED ABOUT THE HOUSE, POLITELY THANKING EVERYONE INDIVIDUALLY FOR GIFTS THEY HAD GIVEN HER. Vanessa's cute, little acts of gratitude were performed under direct instruction from her parents, of course. The adults, all related to each other in one way or another, paired off or formed into small clique and settled down for a quiet afternoon (which would undoubtedly turn into a quite loud evening) of enjoying one another's company. At almost every family get-together, the women would stake out the kitchen and dining room areas as their territory for the festivities. There was no objection from the men at all, for they were most content gathering in the living room to watch whatever ball game happened to be on the television and also to imbibe rather large quantities of alcohol. A few of my uncles would drink only beer, while others were die-hard scotch men who would diligently deplete the partyholder's supply of Dewar's White Label. Others weren't nearly as finicky and would happily consume anything. Family parties held no boundaries for the children. They would scamper around, screaming and giggling, making sure to cover every square inch of the house. Their travels would often draw firm reproaches from parents. Except for me.

I was exempt from little children's games because, you see, I was thirteen then and a young man—young yes, but still a man. Mom would be sure to remind me of this every time I did something wrong with one of her famous "Thomas, you'd better get over here right now

if you know what's good for you, young man." I would never think of playing stupid kid games with cousins who were only ten or eleven; no way, not me. Instead, at the ripe old age of thirteen, I was then able to join the company of men; except, of course, I sipped Cokes.

Now, aside from being hearty eaters and drinkers, all my uncles from both sides of the family were hearty sportsmen. Baseball, football, basketball, you name it, they loved them all. Did they hunt and fish? Hey, you bet. These were real men, here. It was at this particular family get-together, the birthday party of seven-year-old Vanessa Hughes, that Uncle Joe said something to me which would greatly influence the course of events for the following day and, although I hadn't known it at the time, for the rest of my life.

As a boy of thirteen, I adored every one of my uncles, especially Uncle Joe. There were times when I had felt almost as close to him as I did my own father. Looking back, I guess the reason for this was that he was Dad's older brother and, since my father looked up to him, so did I. That is — until the hunt anyway.

I can remember the words he said to me as if he were still there today and told me just five minutes ago. I remember a lot, actually. He hoisted me up on his mountain of a knee. His breath was heavy, as was the hand which tousled my hair. He looked me in the eye, winked and said, "You know, Tommy, a man just isn't a man until he makes his first kill in the wild."

Whether Uncle Joe had actually meant what he had said or whether he was merely supplying me with a confidence-booster for tomorrow's hunting trip into the Endless

Mountains, I wasn't quite sure at the time. To tell you the truth, I'm still not exactly sure. Whatever his intentions were, Uncle Joe sure set the thirteen-year-old me to thinking about the hunting excursion to the Poconos scheduled for the next day.

That night I lay in bed thinking. I thought a whole lot. . . *not a man until he made his first kill* . . .

I shot a bird dead with a BB gun, once. But I felt bad after doing it, real bad. What did that make me?

. . . *in the wild* . . .

Yeah, that was in Charlie Finn's backyard. I blew a little sparrow off of Charlie's garage. That was hardly the wild. Besides, after running over and seeing the bird with a hole in its chest and feathers everywhere . . .

"Nice shot, Tommy!"

"Shut up, Chuck." (Up-chuck—he hates that but, boy, do I laugh.)

I didn't feel much like shooting anymore. I told Chuck that I had to leave for supper. On the way home I thought of the bird and cried. And that I've never told anyone.

. . . *just isn't a man* . . .

Real men don't cry. Right you are, Uncle Joe, but don't you worry; I'll be a man after tomorrow . . . or would I? Sure, I went to Hunter's Safety School and got my license and everything. Dad even took me shooting a few times to get me used to the gun. I was a pretty good shot, too. I guess the real question is: Do I want to shoot a deer, or better yet, could I actually kill a deer? I mean a deer was so much bigger and more alive than a dumb old bird. Still, I felt bad after shooting it.

"Nice shot, Tommy!"

"Shut up, Chuck."

I'm trying to picture me standing in the woods, blasting away at a deer. I shoot and

the deer tips over, like in a shooting gallery, and pops back up again. I doubt it really happens like that. The bird didn't pop back up.

. . . *Tommy* . . . *just isn't a man* . . .

Oh well, we'll see tomorrow, Joe, ol' buddy. If that's what it takes to be a man, then . . . well, we'll just see. I finally rolled over and went to sleep.

Thinking back again, I must have been quite a sight. There I was carrying a gun as big as I was and glowing obnoxiously of fluorescent orange. Oh yeah, I must have looked just like Daniel Boone in my orange ski cap. Everyone else (my Dad, Uncle Eddie and, of course, Uncle Joe) was practically in full camouflage. This was not exactly legal if I remember correctly. Uncle Joe was carrying a .30/.40 Craig. I thought it was a bazooka at the time. The .30/.40 Craig was used by the British to mow down trees and wasn't exactly legal for hunting either.

We hunted all morning, under a sky the color of gun-metal, without spotting a single thing and I can't say that I was altogether disappointed. My fingers and toes were numb. I didn't think I had a nose anymore and I was starving. Thankfully, we were on our way out of the woods for lunch, so I didn't complain. Besides, the other men weren't complaining. But then again, none of the other men had to lug around a weapon that was as big as themselves, except for Uncle Joe. Christ, back then I swore it was a bazooka like I had seen on Rat Patrol!

Looking like weary soldiers emerging from battle with one little orange prisoner, we made our way out of the forest. I was the first to see it. The deer was nudging the snow-covered ground with its muzzle in search of food. Suddenly, I was warm. I must have frozen in my tracks and gasped because just seconds later everyone was huddled around me. More

words were then etched into my memory. This time they were those of my father, "There you go, son . . . he's all yours."

I tried to swallow the large lump which had lodged itself in my throat, but no such luck. I looked to all of them just in case they may have changed their minds, but once again, no such luck. I was met with wide eyes, smiles and reassuring nods. I'm not quite sure if they noticed just how reluctantly I raised my rifle.

I brought my aim onto the deer. Looking through the notch of the sight, I saw the deer staring right back at me. Its eyes, its expressionless, black eyes were actually locked with mine. Nothing in the woods moved or made a sound. Nothing. I wondered when someone would put their hands over my ears to silence the steady whump-pump, whump-pump of my heartbeat. I was no longer warm. I was hot. Amazingly enough, I was sweating and I still couldn't swallow. I slid my finger onto the trigger and slowly clicked off the safety.

. . . first kill. . .

Thoughts raced through my mind.

. . . a man. . .

I suddenly realized that manhood was just one smooth squeeze away.

. . . Nice shot, Tommy. . .

Just before I fired I remembered picking off the little sparrow. I remembered crying. I remembered lying in bed the night before, doubting that I could kill a deer. Doubt was now dissipating into sureness. Could I kill this creature? I didn't think so. No, I knew so. I couldn't bring myself to drive a bullet into its body. Suddenly, the thought of playing stupid kid games didn't seem so bad. I supposed that there was plenty of time to grow up and become a man. Why hadn't anyone covered my ears to quiet the pounding? Why wasn't

anyone nudging me to take the shot? God, it seemed I was standing there, my rifle pointed directly at the deer, for at least a century. In actuality, it was over in seconds.

I adjusted my aim about a foot to the right, far enough to miss the deer, which was still staring at me, but not far enough for my spectators to notice. I squeezed the trigger. The rifle roared and jolted me backwards a bit. My jaw dropped in a mixture of horror and disbelief, as a deep red crater suddenly appeared on the animal's chest. The impact slammed the deer to the ground leaving a gore-smattered imprint in the snow. It struggled to stand, let out a sobbing wheeze and toppled once to the ground, where it lay shuddering in bloody slush. I thought I would erupt into torrid streams of tears, but somehow I managed to choke them off; at least until I fell into bed that night.

"Nice shot, Tommy. . ."

"Shut up, Chuck."

Family gatherings came and family gatherings went and, as I continued to grow into adulthood, I learned to take orations from uncles, or from anyone for that matter, with a grain of salt. As the torch was passed between generations, I was left with a wealth of anecdotes, advice and keen insights on life, whether requested or not. I was also left with many memories—many fond memories. It's strange, but some evenings when my children are tucked in tight and I slip into bed next to my wife, I can still hear voices. I can still hear Uncle Joe and little Charles Finn. On those particular nights, a tear of something that I can't quite explain slips from the corner of my eye as I drift off into sleep.

"Nice shot, Tommy!"

"Good night, Chuck."

John McLaughlin

THE GIANT

"Eat what you open," he always said
because I liked to turn the key that rolled the lid back
like a quilt from sardines naked
in their beds.

We'd sit amid the Friday maze
of buttered bowls and sticky spoons, orange peels closed in paperbacks
and empty Old Milwaukee bottles rolled
around our unsaid rite.

The Daily News was smoothed down flat to table
spicy hard-shelled crabs that scorched my mouth. I
sipped his beer and sucked a salty cut that burned.
And little Patty meited in his chair in mismatched socks and
underwear,
reading Tolstoy,
while we watched the All-Star Wrestlers clash
like boars.

My father never said too much. We'd sit and eat and drink
and watch,
but soft, there was, a whispered voice that wrapped us both
above the night.

When Bogie's final smoke was snuffed
and when the T.V. flickered specks,
his great arms bore me, delicate
Like Christopher,
he'd trudge the stairs.

Theresa Kelley



Photo: Tom Zuback

RUNAWAY

"Tonight," you said,
 "Don't walk away."
 Ok, I won't walk . . .
 I'll run like hell.

You seemed so
 innocent
 lying there
 on the hotel room bed
 with your head
 pillowed by my chest,
 legs curled into
 a fetal position

And your persistence
 reduced me to a child
 crying over milk
 that spilled years ago
 curdled and rank
 because no one took the time
 to clean it up.

"Maybe a brain tumor," you said.
 "Stay with me tonight."
 "That's no excuse . . .
 Anyway, I don't feel like it."

Locked safely in the hotel bathroom
 I stared at a tear-streaked face . . .
 terrified.

"No," I said to my image,
 "Please, God,
 don't do this to me."

I ran
 in silence.
 I ran until you gave up the chase.
 And I watched you
 fall farther and farther
 into the distance
 until you disappeared.

Donna Sue James

A MATTER OF MORALS

Dare you
 make me yours?
 My morals
 lie in
 immorality
 You are
 a good
 Catholic boy.

We dissolved
 the rules,
 for a moment,
 and I became
 your angel
 (you wore **my**
 horns from Hades).

But the rules
 reaffirmed themselves,
 and those
 damn vows
 you pledged to your
 God
 tore us apart!

Michele Broton

POLITICS

Compromise my principles
 then lose my affection.
 Don't try to change me,
 my beliefs were mine
 before you were.

R. G. Haywood

CONVENIENCE

I found you in your suffering,
 put back the pieces, and carried you home.
 We're comfortable; convenient.
 Ports in storms; roadside rests.
 Yet,
 I'd tolerate pain for you,
 walk the longest walk,
 drive the darkest mile,
 sign over my accounts,
 or stand up in your defense.
 It's not so much I love you:
 I'm just scared of empty houses.

Melanie Kutz

PART-TIME FRIENDSHIP

A feeling of incomplete bonding —
 Unshared thoughts, ideas —
 False sympathy and understanding —
 Love on a schedule.
 and deadlines to keep.

I can see you,
 that image is strong.
 But when you look at me
 I seem to fade away.

I wish you could see me
 as I see you,
 through my eyes —
 rose-shaded with love.

R. G. Haywood

THE FALSENESS OF MY LOVE

How do you write of love
 when you have never felt it?
 Forever there is a void
 Between like and love
 where "almost" is a key word —
 You can't write that.

It is a sadness
 To see others enjoying
 what you don't even understand.

But I have an imagination
 and a romantic heart;
 I write a lot of "I love you's"
 Which everyone believes to be true.
 Only I can see
 The falseness of my love.

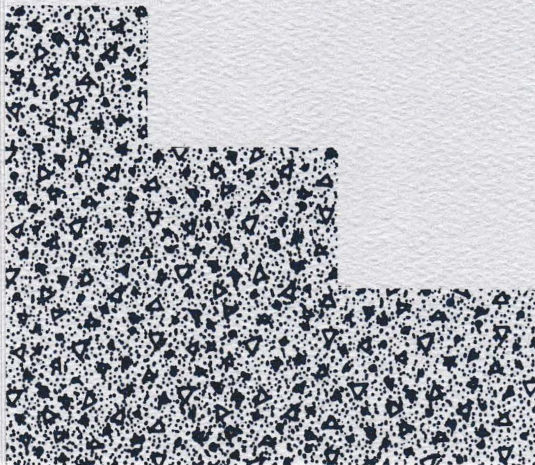
R. G. Haywood



A MOMENT WITHOUT YOU

The moon
 surrenders its glow
 to the darkened clouds around it
 The night is silent
 but for one lone night bird
 calling in the distance
 The air
 lies damp and heavy
 upon the valley
 The candle
 flickers in the wind
 as its flame turns into darkness
 This room is silent
 but for an old small clock
 forever ticking softly
 Each moment
 passes, slower than the last
 without you here

Michelle Lane



YOU ARE HERS NOW

September was the nickname I gave you
 For the colors in your hair,
 But now when I call out that name,
 I know I won't find you anywhere.

I remember so many warm dreamy nights
 When together we'd walk, hand in hand,
 But now the footprints of two young lovers
 Are those of one, all alone in the sand.

The beaches we used to laugh and play on
 Now call me and mock me and scold;
 The towering rocks where we'd run and we'd hide
 Are like my heart now, unloving and cold.

September, you said we always would play —
 That is, until she came along;
 She promised to take you away from it all.
 Why couldn't you see it was wrong?

She's taken so many others;
 It's a shame that she also took you;
 For once you were hers, you could never return
 To the living and loving and playing you knew.

September, you said you'd always love me;
 We shared dreams like husband and wife.
 But September, if you really did love me,
 Why did you choose her and not life?

Michelle Lane

I CANNOT SAY THAT . . .

I cannot say that
 I am indifferent;
 If I could hate
 it would be easy for me.
 You say that I am
 a Hopeless Romantic,
 Yet I live by
 the vanity of my human wishes,
 And perhaps, for me,
 the light shines
 brighter through the clouds
 Though its appearances
 Are few and far between.
 Yet I live for that
 moment
 And for the blink of time
 I ascend to the ninth —
 To an illumination
 You may never see
 Until you find the way
 To pass the eighth.
 Only if you try will you succeed.
 And for you & I there is no try —
 There is only do.

Gail Wilpiseszki

CHRISTMAS BLUES

Christmas Blues
 on a
 New Year's Night,
 silent night,
 never holy,
 making merry with
 a bottle of
 Seagram's 7 . . .
 seven days 'til
 life begins again . . .
 working and
 shopping for next
 years gifts.
 50% off, save a bundle . . .
 'Tis the season . . .
 again
 and I'll have a blue
 Christmas without you.

Michele Broton

HUSHED WORDS . . .

Hushed words,
 Not intended for my ears
 Lovers' crossed wires,
 Over the miles.

Long distance
 Between their sighs
 Not their hearts
 Their secrets, mine now.

A T & T foul-up,
 Caused an intrusion
 Crossed our paths
 Over the miles.

Kathleen Flinsch

I NEED TO LOOK INTO YOUR EYES . . .

I need to look into your eyes
from time to time
I can see myself inside you
I'm calling me in, seeing you
at my side

When I look into your eyes

I need to feel your breath
from time to time
I want to breathe within you
and hold your life within my lungs

Your breeze may wave upon my face
as your intuition matches my mood and pulse

— We are striving for one

I need to walk removed from you
from time to time
The air is again clear
And once more I can begin
as I see you in a passing cloud
and hear you in a child
and taste you in my thoughts
and rush back to become your lover
and within the wind we meet.

Rob Johansen

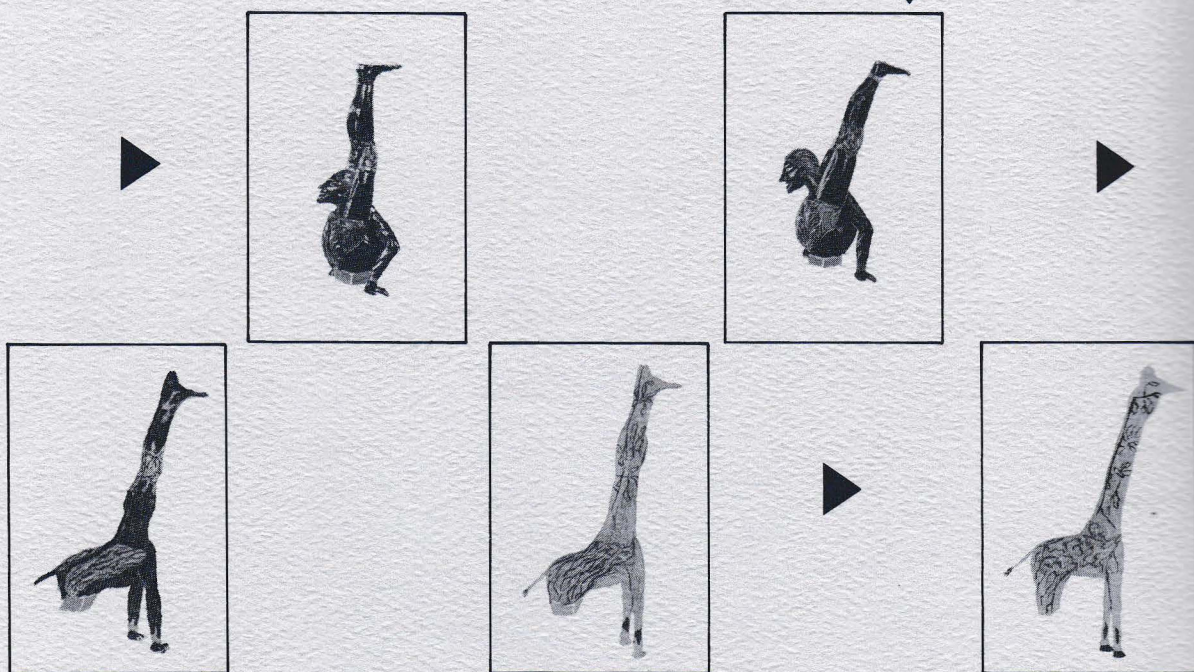


Drawing: Peter Uritz

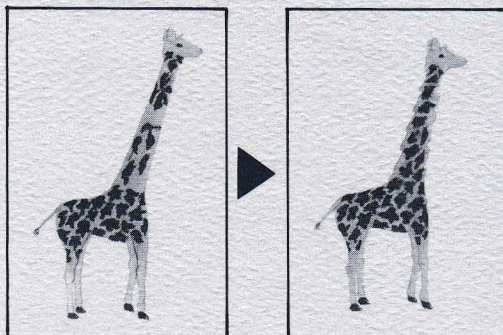
A VISIT TO THE PAST

Attic brimming with memories
A dusty book, pages carry faded pictures telling
my life story.
In the back between love letters left from a
lighter time,
Dried roses
A tarnished chain holds my precious ring like a
child.
My tattered teddy bear stands guard over stained
clothing,
Reeking of twenty years past
Ripped concert tickets litter the room as
Charlotte's Web and *Winnie the Pooh* gather dust.
A tear runs down my cheek and falls
Like new rain
On records wrapped in coats of cobwebs and dust.
I turn and leave my past where it belongs,
Behind.

Kathleen S. Anderson



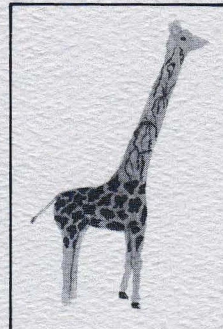
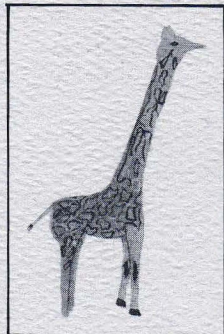
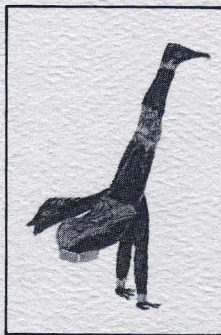
REALIZATIONS



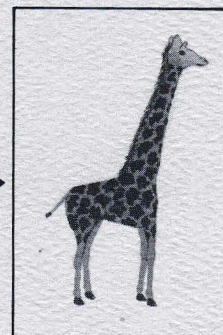
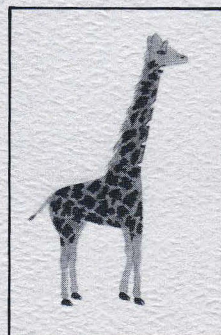
Growing pains ache inside of me
as I pull farther away from there.
That old abandoned spot where I
belonged for way too long.

Your paintings, father, still haunt me in my twenties,
but paint is all that is left for me now.

Reds, from your beard, swirl with blues
and greens from your eyes,
staining my soul and blackening my sight.
Sometimes your eyes would follow me all afternoon.



Jane would sit on my lap and we would compare
 your hair color to mine.
 Those afternoons flooded by intense rain storms
 and lightning come back to me in every raindrop
 We only had three channels but Jane loved the snow.
 Those pains tug at me, pulling me always —
 further away —
 molding me, shaping me,
 forming me.
 Change my hair, my eyes. . . make me not yours.



IT HAPPENED AGAIN . . .

It happened again
I just had a
Damn good poem
Going through my head
And by the time
I found my pen
And paper
It was gone
Kinda like
When I called you
Friday
I had all the words
Chosen
I was gonna tell you
That I hate you
That I'm tired
So very tired
And go away now
'Cause I'm not losing
Again
And I felt the words
Dissolving as
I listened to the phone
Ring
And by the time
You sat down
In my room
My speech was gone
And once again
We parted
Friends

Carolyn Swalina

FOR ~~YOU~~ ME

You came walking out of nowhere
Was I dreaming, another Fantasy?
Were you a ghost, another Nightmare?
Again you made me feel strange
Like I tripped into a pitifully sad song
Fell into the soundtrack of a tear-drenched, dull
movie.
He wrote them for his bread,
 You bought them for your stereo, your VCR.
 I cry during them, torture myself in
their rerun.
I wanted, want you.
You cared. . .
 maybe
You meet me now, older,
 The same people, different people.
You see me, cordially shake my hand,
 SHAKE MY HAND!
I don't see. I don't know.
I just feel,
 hear,
 smell,
 taste —
You, then.
 Never now!

Ralph W. Middaugh, Jr.

DRINK IN . . .

Drink in
 Deep blues, blacks
 The ocean
 Surrounds me
 I grasp
 The wave
 It eludes
 My hand
 I try
 To float
 But sink
 There's things
 Down here
 That slide
 I touch them
 In my blindness
 And recoil
 And scream
 Silently
 Death
 Lives here
 I breathe
 The salt
 So silent
 So peaceful
 I drink
 The deep blues
 And blacks

Carolyn Swalina

THE PRISONER

The rain on my window
 Sparkles like jewels
 As I look out
 The trees are but shadows
 Set against the last
 Light in the sky
 I wish I could feel the rain
 And see the sun
 But all is dark
 Out in the hallway
 Silent echoes
 Pass by my room
 And continue on
 I'm still alone
 It is getting darker
 I light a candle
 And watch it burn
 The light is flickering
 Throwing shadows on
 The gray stone walls
 Do they still remember
 That I am here
 When they pass by
 Do I still remember
 What it was like
 Out there with them
 The candle has burned out
 I am in the darkness
 Here with the rain
 I cannot escape
 This prison I built
 in my mind

Carolyn Swalina

LOOKING FROM THE BOTTOM UP

RAY DIDN'T WALK DOWN THE STREET, HE GLIDED. He swayed from side to side like trains do in one of those old western movies. His chubby right arm swung back and forth like a pendulum on a grandfather clock, while his chubby left arm deposited its hand in the pocket of his navy blue chino slacks.

Ray was a pudgy, dark-haired Puerto Rican who wore nothing but chino slacks, white tank top t-shirts, and worn-out canvas Converse All-Stars.

Ray was gliding toward one of our favorite hangouts, a three-foot-high red brick wall, which was cracked and pitted like a face with bad acne.

Hanging out was our way of life in Rahway, New Jersey. The unsuspecting fellow who ventured too close to our turf was subject to a number of rude treatments. The intruding fellow was usually greeted with evil stares, stares which were so hard they could cut diamonds. These hangouts belonged to us and only us.

"Yo man, you got a problem?" Ray would bark coldly.

The innocent fellow's eyes would shift elsewhere and his pace would quicken.

"I didn't think so," Ray would add as he let out a cackle that would make any witch jealous.

I hung out with Ray because he was my best friend. We grew up, fought, played, and got in trouble together. Rahway was far from being a visual work of art, but one thing was certain: to Ray and me it was home.

"Welcome to Rahway, New Jersey — Home

of the Rahway Indians" read the battered sign. Broken Colt 45 beer bottles claimed some space around the base of the beaten sign, not to mention various other pieces of unwanted materials which now made their home there. The sign was dented from kids hitting it with baseball bats. The red letters stood boldly against the black background. Rust marks streaked down the front of the sign, almost as if it had been crying.

Rubbish lay in other places besides around the base of the crying welcome sign. Empty Foodtown bags, old crushed soda cans, assorted items which fell out of a ripped garbage bag that the stray cat had been in, leftover pieces from car accidents, and broken beer bottles from the tavern across the street cluttered the curb.

Cars, all of which could have used the Macco touch, parked along the curbs, added to the trash that was already there. Occasionally, a canary yellow Corvette Stingray would park in front of the neighbor's house. The owner must have been from out of town. We would stand around and gaze at the beautiful Corvette as if we had never seen something worth that much money. (But we had seen pictures.) Each one of us would fantasize of someday (legally) owning such a luxurious sports car.

The houses on our street didn't resemble the canary-yellow Corvette but the beat-up cars parked near the litter-filled curbs. Aluminum siding and shingles missing, faded and chipped paint, and half-fallen-down rain gutters were trademarks of the houses on our block.

The houses were constructed so close together that there was just about enough room to park one of those poor excuses for a car between them.

In front of many of the houses, there was no such thing as a concrete sidewalk. Most of the time, dirt and gravel played the role of a sidewalk. The areas in which concrete had the leading role were usually cracked and broken up. The only grass that could grow sprouted up through the cracks and crevices in the concrete sidewalks. Ray and I traveled those busted sidewalks every day, whether it was going to play, running from trouble, or going to school.

Roosevelt School was an old red brick building with a newer yellow brick building attached to it. "Tyrone loves Sandra", unknown shapes and obscene words and symbols were etched onto the red and yellow bricks with various spraypaint colors. Inside, things were not much different.

Two massive grey metal doors allowed entrance into the old abused school. Beyond the massive doors awaited a dark, wide hallway. Like soldiers, the grey lockers stood at attention and lined both sides of the gloomy hall. Where no lockers stood, the walls were coated with an off-white paint, chipping off and dripping onto the shining grey tiles, the only light which led into the classrooms.

The off-white paint covered the cinderblock walls. Two chalkboards hung upon the walls and always had a light film of white chalk dust on them. Unlike the hallway tiles, the red tiles in the classrooms did not shine. The dullness could be blamed on the dragging around of the desk and chair units.

The windows practically stretched from the ceiling to the floor, only stopping at the black-filled ledge. Through these windows, the joy of the day awaited.

A blacktop surface, enclosed by a silver fence, was where we played during recess. We were locked in like prisoners in Rahway State Penitentiary, but we were only doing 20 to 30 (minutes). Kids ranging from four to seven-years-old would strut around the recess prison yard being as bad as could be. Some propped themselves up against the brick walls, while others hung around the twelve-foot-high silver fence. Although the blacktop was for play, it was best known as the place to have a few good fights.

There was an occasional fight during lunch, but the main events occurred after school. One thing I learned the hard way was to stand up and take your lumps. It was better for your health in the long run.

"If you don't fight, man, you're gonna get your ass kicked in every day after school", Ray would constantly mutter.

Ray spoke from experience. If he was only in three fights a week, things were slow. But Ray wasn't the only "Dirty Harry" toughguy of the town. When it came to toughness, there were guys in Rahway who could have made Dirty Harry wish he were directing traffic.

Things did not come easy for Ray and me. Things were handed to us. We made the best with what we had. Although starting at the bottom was not easy, it did have its advantages.

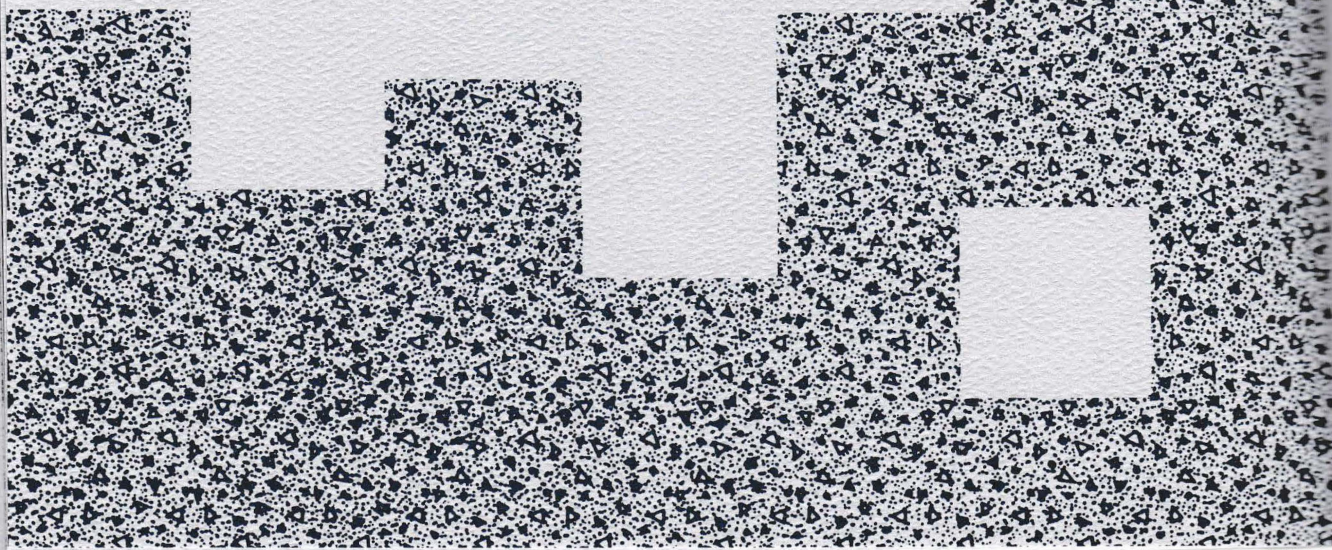
Starting at the bottom allowed us to look up at the possibilities to come. In the beginning, we thought Rahway was as good as life could get. As time went on, this idea changed for

some. Although we were not actually in the state penitentiary, we were prisoners of the town. We knew if we stayed in Rahway, our minds would wind up littered with junk like the curbs. Our exteriors showed us off to be as hard as steel, but our interiors were like the welcome sign: battered and crying.

It was once said that you become a product of your environment. This certainly describes Ray. He is still wearing those same old navy blue chino slacks and those same old white t-shirts. The worst part is he still believes that Rahway is as good as life can get.

For those lucky enough to escape, it makes it easier to appreciate what little luxury we have now achieved, and it heightens our thirst for success. We don't ever want to relive the days of Rahway, only remember them. Or in some cases, forget them.

Ed Buonocore



PROPHECY

Lilting themes resound
The strings of the soft violin
As Nero sang Rome to death,
The strings did the same within.

Looking into depths of fate,
the catastrophic prophet
opened eyes that burned with doom
and with them made the earth set.

Then, looming into caverns deep,
That prophet made a plea:
"Take the moon into your care
And do the same with me."

The world spins, the sun smiles
and the oceans leave the shore
As darkness lightens days of life
And peacefulness fades to war.

The elk and mare become one
As the sun sets and stars fall,
And Cassius turns from his tomb
as villiany conquers all.

"Leave to wickedness the curse
That quickens winter rain,
And give the gift of innocence
To those who feel but pain."

Judas lifts his heavy head
As though his heart would break
And screams a cry to heaven high
For pity for his sake.

The mist heals wounds inflicted
By generals, strong and fine,
And leaves turn green evermore
As the prophet gives his sign

With thunderous resonance
His chant echoes his power,
For breezes blow warmly
While the earth turns its hour

Slowly and steadily riding
The tide of the vast dark sea,
The souls, lost forever, sail,
As the saints live in reverie.

The prophet turns to the sky
And asks how the task has run.
Yet no reply returns to him,
Therefore he knows he has won.

Still, peace does not forever
live. It takes a circled path.
And prophets die like other men
To satisfy God's wrath.

The world spins, the sun smiles
And the oceans leave the shore
As darkness lightens days of life
And peacefulness fades to war.

Goodness succumbs to evil
And in its caverns the demons dwell.
In hearts of gold or hearts of stone
Exists the path to hell.

Paul Winarski

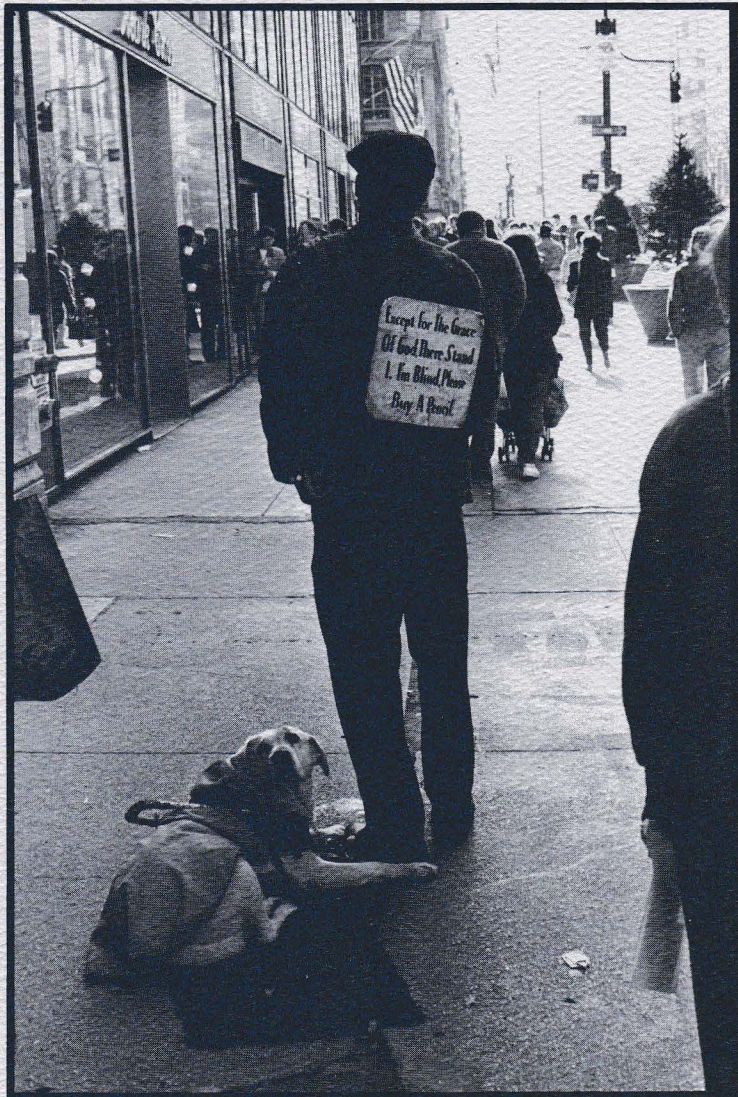


Photo: Tom Zuback



THOSE DAYS

Somedays you can't do it.
 Whether it be the rain
 or economics,
 your insides burst from all the scandals
 and talk shows.

But those days when his hair
 feels like the fringes of soft silk
 and the coming together of skin,
 soft and fleshy, leaves you tired
 and dazed, like your brain has been numbed
 and your eyes ache to sleep,
 those are the days.

Your heart pounds inside your ears and fingers
 and quivering voices whisper
 (even though no one else is home).

Those are the days that thunder comes from heaven
 and sounds out, despite busy highways and old women
 sweeping sidewalks, pushing away cinders from winter
 (and minutes from their lives).

Those are the days you find you can.

Melanie Kutz



MEMORIES . . .

Memories
 Of dagger sharp words
 And cruel lying eyes
 Soft promises
 Never kept
 Images slice through my mind
 Shred my sanity
 Faces of the past
 Staring, accusing
 In the night
 Alone but for tormenting visions
 Panic sets in
 Reach out
 And grasp only air
 Mouth opens
 In a silent scream
 Insect in a spider's web
 Paralyzed in the darkness
 Trapped by chance
 Awaiting the end

Carolyn Swalina

GHOST HIGHWAY

I
 Driving on the ghost highway
 I can only see as far
 As the headlights drag
 The dotted white lines
 Blur with the asphalt
 I travel this road
 Alone, listening to the
 Hum of my tires
 The cliffs rise to my right
 And drop to my left
 Where I can see
 The stars
 And the lights of houses
 I never know

II
 I have accomplished nothing
 In this life
 And I don't feel I
 Ever will
 Twenty years from now
 They'll be burying me
 Six feet under a tombstone
 Proclaiming nothing

III
 The first cut
 Is always the worst
 My stomach turns
 As the wall is sprayed red
 And the eyes open
 And I scream and wake up

IV
 Two trucks race
 Neck-and-neck
 On the stretch
 Below me
 And then fade away
 Over the distant mountain
 There's smoke
 It glows in their
 Streetlights
 A sign for miles
 That all has died here
 The people cry

V
 Some people
 Have to travel
 Have to become one
 Of those faces
 You strain to see
 In a dashboard's glow
 When you stay
 You grow old
 And forget why
 You existed
 So you run from
 That world
 But the dreams never leave
 The glow is everywhere
 And you drive the
 Ghost highway

Carolyn Swalina

THE DEVIL AND MUSIC

If the Devil were to
decide to write a piece
of beautiful music, would it
not be within his powers
to grasp a black feather
with his frigid black hands,
sit before a black undusted
piano, grin as he cracks
the black knuckles of his
long fingers which induce evil
at the most silent snap,
and then, without beautiful inspiration,
compose an adagio which would
fill even Beethoven and Mozart
with the green blood of envy?

MAN, EARTH, AND MODERN TIMES

Majestic mountains sleep
underneath tranquil horizons
imbued by flaming sunsets
Those flames lick at the pavement
on endless busy highways
that scar those hills of beauty
Twisted nets of power lines
hold hostage the horizon
and cloud the flaming sun
The traces of men flourish
in a world of fading beauty
. . . a world of men's progression

Michelle Lane





I went back to you, old house, today.
The trees are just as big and the lilac bush we planted is still
there and the grapevine, oh the grapevine,
it still protects that old weathered picnic table.
I stand here now, like a stranger at strange gates or a prisoner
locked out, weeping from anguish not quite vented before.
Searching for truths about life in this old place,
needing the comfort of its warm, dark rooms, lacking the
keys to these old memories.
It's been years now, old house, can you still whisper my name
like you did on those crisp December mornings and call
me to your front bedrooms to warm the window sills with
candles for Christ?
You must certainly remember those moments, old house,
as you warm the rooms for new believers now.
I stand and look at that cold, blue pool that we built
two busy hands gnarled with anguish
and wince with thoughts
of others' pleasures unintended.
Do we still haunt you, old house?
Do our echoes cry for mercy as sleepers toss and turn?
As I stand outside these electrified fences I feel
your existence inside of me, behind me, and around me.
You address me, old house, as I address you
for days since past
and a younger me.
Perhaps, in one of those big flowery tombs,
lie the foundations of my dead childhood.

Melanie Kutz



GETTING AWAY

Rumpled stockings cluster at her ankles
She wears white tennis shoes —
They look silly with the print dress she wears.

The sneakers were a gift from her son
She wears them to remind her of him —
Rarely does she see him anymore.

He told her he needed to move away —
Had to move away —
Said there was nothing here.

But she was here.
— Was she nothing?
She never gets away.

The farthest away she got was the corner store —
And an occasional scribbled post card from her son.

Tom Griffith



Painting: Chris Dodds

THE WINNER

IT WAS A HOT SPRING DAY AND I WAS ON MY WAY HOME FROM BASEBALL PRACTICE. I didn't have a good day at practice, and I just wanted to go home. But Pete James, the guy I hit with a pitch that day, stopped me.

"How's the arm, Pete?" I ask him.

"Screw you, Rob," he says. "You beaned me 'cause I caught that liner you hit."

I say, "Look, Pete, I told you it was a great catch. It's not like I'm gonna get mad at you." And since it was hot and I was tired and he was annoying me, I added, "Anyway, if I wanted to bean you, I'd a cracked your ugly face."

"You couldn't hit the side of a barn," he says. I thought, if I couldn't hit anything, how does he figure I beaned him?

Anyway, I say, "But your head is bigger," so he says, "Shut up or I'll crack your ugly face."

Now the kid's dad just died and all, but I can't let him push me around, 'cause he's Joe Jock and I'm a straight-A nerd and I gotta work harder to protect my rep. I know I can take him, what with the karate lessons. And anyway, what would Sylvia Tumaszyk (sigh) think? So I gotta be tough.

"Pete, you'd be dead before you ever touched me."

He goes, "Pffft, I'd take you any day." I told him I was taking karate lessons, but he says that sissy kickin' don't scare him.

So I tell him, "If we fight, we're gonna get kicked off the team."

He just says, "After the season, then," and walks away.

One Monday about two and a half weeks

later, I had ants in my pants all day. I spent the entire day fidgeting and staring at the clock. But my teachers didn't mind—at least I wasn't making wisecracks.

Finally school was over! I shot out of that crummy ol' junior high school like a guy at a circus being fired out of a cannon, 'cause I had no more practice! Finally, the whole day was mine! I couldn't wait to get home and . . .

Someone smacked me on the back. I turned around and it was Pete. Dammit, I thought, he remembered.

"Season's over," he says. "Now I'm gonna smash your head in."

I didn't feel like fighting. Heck, I wasn't even mad at him anymore. I know, I thought, I'll tell him . . .

A hand on my shoulder. Who is it now? I thought. I turn around and it's (gasp) Sylvia!

"Don't worry, Rob," she says. "I think you can take him." And then she smiled at me!

Well, that settled it. Pete had to die.

We went into an alley and a ring of kids formed around us. At the edge was (sigh) Sylvia. Then Bobby "The Bookie" Williams came out of the crowd. He says, "O.K., guys. No eyes, ears, throat, or balls. Fight 'til someone can't get back up. Now, kill each other." As Bobby started taking bets on winner, time, and first blood, I was staring at Pete. Was he shaking? Nah. Just me.

Pete marched over and threw a roundhouse right. I ducked and gave him a left jab to the face. He threw six or seven punches to my gut, and I let him. On the last one, I grabbed his

arm, elbowed him in the ribs, and gave him a backfist in the mouth. He grunted and threw a right cross. I blocked it and kicked him in the chest, knocking him back a few steps.

He looked around at the ring of kids, and they were laughing 'cause Mr. Jock was taking a beating from a bookworm. Tears welled up in his eyes and he charged, screaming.

As he ran toward me, it all clicked together for me. This kid isn't the bad guy, I thought. In fact, he's not so different from me. He was upset about his dad and took it out on me, and when people heard about his challenge to me he couldn't back down. He prob'ly figured I would. Now a guy whose whole reputation is built on being a physical guy is getting whapped by a nerd. I really felt sorry for him. . . .

In the tenth of a second that I thought about all that, Pete reached for me. I grabbed him and put my knee in his chest as I fell back. He fell with me and I kicked, sending him flying over my head.

I got up and went to where Pete was laying. Everyone was yelling for me to finish him off, including Sylvia. I knew what I had to do.

I went over to where he was laying. I reached down and grabbed him. He tried to push me away, but I dragged him to his feet.

"Pete, I'm hurtin'," I told him. "Let's call it a draw."

He looked at me for a second like I was the Elephant Man. Then he smiled and shook my hand. I yelled, "Fight's over, Bobby. It's a draw."

"The Bookie" yelled, "All bets are off," and walked away, mumbling.

The crowd moaned and groaned and split up for home. What a dull, they must'a figured. Sylvia jogged towards me. . . and straight past

to Bobby.

For a minute, I felt crushed. Everyone, including Sylvia, thought I was a loser. But I knew I was the real winner that day.

Rob Hermanofski

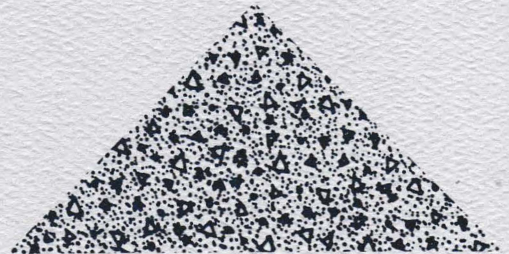
IT IS THE TIME FOR COLORED LIGHTS . . .

It is the time for colored lights
blinking on barren, weather-worn trees
and synthetic white snow
stenciled on busy store windows.
For carolers to sing sweetly
but mostly off-key.
For children's excitement to climax
almost before the great day
with presents being opened earlier
and earlier as each year passes.

It is sad to note
so many with fake evergreens standing
perfectly erect and decorated,
put away in the same state they came out.
And the hustle and bustle beginning
on the second of January —
for next year's season!
And does anyone really remember
whether Christmas is for Jesus
or St. Nicholas?

I just watch it come
and go,
a season for great joy
and great sorrow.
Does it have its meaning today,
or is it as barren and weather-worn
as the trees
and as fake as the synthetic snow
on store windows
with Santa Claus as the real messiah?

R. G. Haywood



OUR FINGERS GRIPPED THE RUSTED IRON GATE . . .

Our fingers gripped the rusted iron gate
that led to chilly solid squares of slate.

We dropped our feet to snow which drifted fresh
around the gate's dry bite, cold metal tasting flesh.

The graveyard spread to show a random wreath
on stones erect, like scales, or jagged teeth.

I followed Sarah's voice to where she knelt.
In beads the snow dripped from the stone to melt
like blood squeezed from a smooth gray polished bust,
it puddled marble, edged with snowy crust.

Two headstones lay and spoke with words engraved.
Two brothers rested — but they used to brave
weaving days, the hard work of a farm,
before the brutal Fever curled her arm.

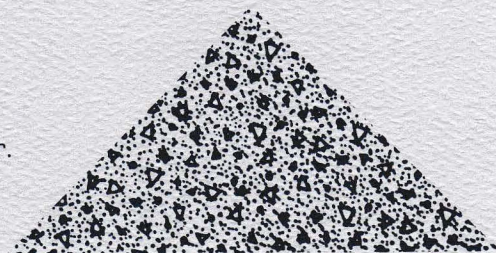
"1853" read the somber stone
which encased the dusty boxes filled with bone.

But maybe when the thunder haunts the sky,
and rain-damp mud soaks cold to where they lie,

Moses grips his brother's trembling hand,
and whispers warmth of somewhere sun-filled lands . . .

A mother still weeps softly by their bed.
Her ghost still bends with wilted, dampened head,
and doesn't lift her startled, lifeless stare
from where her babies sleep — she holds the empty air.

Theresa Kelley



I LOOKED BACK ON THOSE OLD LETTERS AND . . .

I looked back on those old letters and
miles became lines that I read too deeply into,
felt the words with my fingers
(carefully, not to rub off the aged ink).
I recall the feelings and smells of a time far forgotten
yet brought back by a sentence.
I forgot how we talked in my driveway,
I forgot how you loved me,
I remembered I didn't.
But now . . . I wish for you on every mile marker
of this depressed town;
No longer wonder why you ran with the fury of possession,
Don't understand the longing in your voice for this sunless hole,
Want like greed for you to rescue me.
Sit by the airport
(on the highway below the mountain)
and wait like family outside a dying man's room.

Melanie Kutz

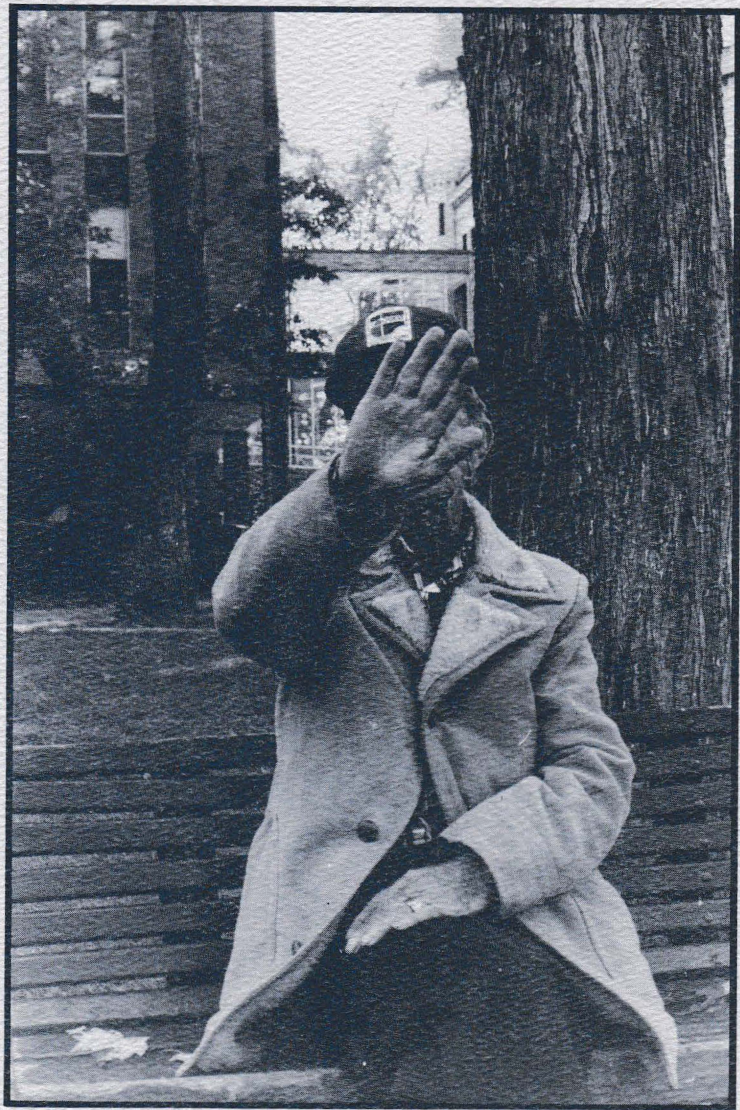


Photo: Tom Zuback



OLD FOLKS' HOME

That's where we'll find her asleep and gone,
the bricks of age that wall her in,
Granny, prone to live overlong,
waves to us from the Old Folks' Home.

Dots of rain on our wet windshield
wipers echo her salutation;
a slight discomfort fills her room
which we try to dispel with congratulation.

Look how we rush to leave her there
driving off in our rented Honda,
while she reclines in a folding chair
to contemplate our denouement.

Bill Barber

OBITUARY

This is my death.
No salute, no remembrance.
An end to obscurity.
The beginning of notoriety.

Eric M. Sullivan



"All right," said Deep Thought. "The Answer to the Great Question...?"
"Yes...!"
"Of Life, the Universe and Everything..." said Deep Thought.
"Yes...!"
"Is...?" said Deep Thought, and paused.
"Yes...!"
"Is...?"
"Yes...!!!...?"
"Forty-Two," said Deep Thought, with infinite majesty and calm.

Douglas Adams

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

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