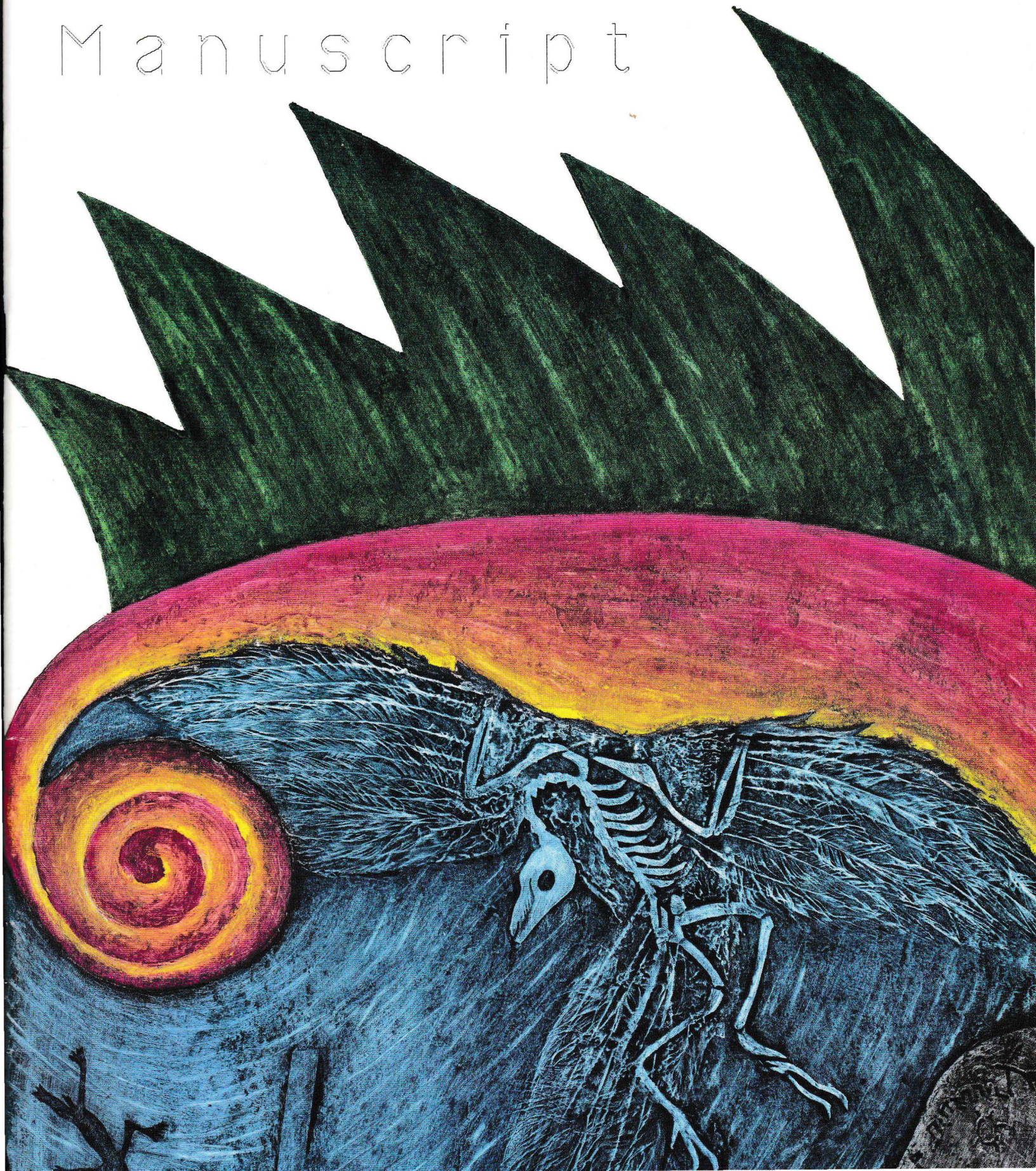


Manuscript



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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.

CAT-SCRATCH FEVER

MELANIE O'DONNELL

"Vodka and tonic, please." The bar stool is cold. It is the beginning of Happy Hour, and a long evening lies ahead, but for now, the bar stool is cold.

"Pretty strong drink for a lady, "Here he is, first one of the evening. Okay, I'll bite.

"I'm a pretty strong lady."

"That so? So what do you do? Construction worker?"

"What about you?"

"I asked you first."

"I don't even know your name."

"Okay...I'm an engineer."

"But that isn't your name."

"Ted."

"Do you engineer an engine? Should I call you railroad Ted?"

"Hey, not so fast...I'm an electrical engineer."

"Worked on anything lately?"

"Yeah, the new Lord & Taylor building. It wasn't too complex, but you know. Big job."

"Pay well?"

"You never told me YOUR name."

"Lola."

"That sounds like a fake name if I've ever heard one. Every girl in a bar's named Lola."

"And they drink champagne and it tastes just like cherry cola. C-O-L-A, cola."

He laughs. "You're cute." He reaches in his back pocket for his wallet. "Bartender, another drink for the lady here."

"Thanks."

"So, Lola, what do you do? I mean, besides drinking champagne. Which you're not, by the way."

"Do you mind?"

"Not really. Champagne reminds me of weddings."

"Everybody loves a wedding...except for men, that is."

"Well now, you've just excluded half of everybody, haven't you?"

"What are you drinking?"

"Coors Light."

"That stuff's for college kids."

He laughs. "Maybe I think it'll make me younger." He holds up his mug to me, clinks my glass slightly. "To men with light beer and women with hard liquor."

"I hear you." We drink. I finish mine. I hold out my hand to him. "Well, Engineer Ted, it was very nice to meet you."

"Where are you going?"

"I'm not going anywhere. But we just met. Scientific researcher Lola greets Engineer Ted."

"Wow, you're a researcher? Really? Where do you work? What kind of research do you do?"

"You seem surprised."

"Well I just didn't expect--"

"What? A woman with a brain?"

"Hey, take it easy. I just think it's incredible that you have both beauty AND brains. You are truly an amazing woman, Lola."

"Yeah ... amazing." I think he's waiting for me to compliment him back. I'm not about to.

"Really, I'm very interested. What field are you in? Biology? Chem? Physics? Whom do you work for?"

"I do private work. Special projects for corporations, that sort of thing."

"Are you working on anything now?"

"Yes, but it's more of a personal project. I'd like to do a scholarly paper on it."

"What does it involve?"

"The reactions of animals to the different human sexes. Right now I'm working with cats."

"I see. You have a scratch on your hand." He reaches out and runs his finger down the red trail that runs from my forefinger to my wrist.

"That's from Nemesis, my own cat. He doesn't like all the company we've been having lately."

"Do you have a lot of cats there?"

"Five others. But I think it's the people he really objects to. You see, I have to have a wide variety of people over in order to test the cats' reactions. If I have the same people over all the time, the cats will just get used to them and react the same to a woman as to a man."

"And what have your findings been so far?"

"Most interesting."

"Oh, I get it, this is the part where you clam up about the experiment. Look, who am I gonna tell? Besides, I think it's fascinating."

"Do you really?"

"Yes. Definitely."

"Well, the cat's reactions seem to vary with what the person is *doing*."

"Such as?"

"Well, for example, if a woman sits down, the cats crawl in her lap. If a man sits down, they bite at his pants leg. When a woman walks in the room, they cry. When a man walks in, they hide."

"So, then, cats have an unfavorable reaction to men?"

"I wouldn't jump to any conclusions about that. I think their reactions are based on a lot of things other than sex, and I haven't yet pinpointed what those factors are."

"Do you have any suspicions?"

"I'm not sure. They may range from the fiber content of the subject's clothing to the person's sexual orientation. It's very difficult to isolate."

"How do you think your cats would react to me?"

"It's hard to judge. I don't really know you that well."

"Sure you do! It's me, your buddy, Coors Light drinking

engineer Ted."

"The cats don't like beer. I don't think you'd make a very good subject."

"Aw, come on! Why don't you let me come over and see?"

"We'll see. Bartender, may I have another drink, please?"

He finally goes away, knowing he is not going to get any tonight. His seat does not grow cold.

"You alone?"

"Aren't we all?"

He laughs. "Hey, yeah, that's why they have these places." To the bartender, "Long Island Iced Tea, please. And for the lady..."

"White wine spritzer."

"Hey, a woman after my own heart. You look incredible. You sure you're alone?"

"Last I checked."

"Well, if you were my sister, I wouldn't let you out of the house like that."

"Really? Why?"

"Some guy's bound to get so horny looking at you that he just won't be able to take it anymore." I wince. "You don't mind me saying that to you, do you? It's true."

I only smile. I wonder how he would look with white wine spritzer on his pants. He'd probably get so excited he'd pee.

"What's your name?"

"Candace."

"Can I call you Candy for short?" He leans toward me until he is only inches away from my ear. "I bet you taste incredible."

"Bartender, another drink, please. And one for the gentleman, too." I open my purse. "It's on me," I say to him.

"I like that in a woman. Not afraid to take a little initiative." His eyes probe into the open darkness of my purse before it snaps shut.

I light a cigarette. "So what's your name?"

"Don't laugh."

"Okay."

"Dick."

I laugh. "Sorry, I can't help it. If the shoe fits..."

"Yeah, but just think of what it does to my ego when a girl calls out my name when she comes," he says. Yeah, right. Probably the only thing he's ever seen come is a bus.

"I bet the women just can't resist you."

"Sometimes I have a problem with that. But my biggest problem right now is how I can't resist you." He has one hand on my leg. "How'd you get this?" he asks, running his finger up the scratch that begins at my knee and disappears under the hem of my skirt.

"My cat likes to sleep with me. And I happen to sleep naked." Oh, boy, he's almost exploding now. He's practically having an orgasm right here.

"And what is it you do when you're naked?" he asks, almost panting.

"Well, it's best to perform rituals while you're naked.

You're more at one with nature. And it's also easier to ask a john to pay up. He can't say no."

That takes care of him. The Happy Hour crowd is thinning out now. Good, there'll be less cheapies. This guy looks pretty interesting.

"Hi."

He looks surprised. "Are you talking to me?"

"I'm sorry... are you with someone?"

"Me? No, no, I'm not with anyone. Are you?"

"Do you think I'd be asking you if I were?"

"No. No, I guess you wouldn't." His left foot plays over the rung on the bar stool.

"My name's Victoria." I hold out my hand, and he takes it.

"Nick."

"It's very nice to meet you, Nick."

"It's nice to be met." He sits down. "What are you drinking?"

"Seven and seven."

"Bartender, another seven and seven for the lady and ... I'll have a Dewar's." He turns back to me. "I don't come here often. But I should. It's nice."

"I guess. I think I come here too much to notice."

"I just don't have the time. You think you will, you know, you think, 'Once I make all this money, I'm set. I can do whatever the hell I want.' But that's not true. You have to work to get it, then you have to work to keep it, then you have to work to get more. Then all you do is work, work, work. It's crazy."

"What do you do?"

"Investment banker."

I look at his hand. "Class ring?"

He takes his eyes from mine. "My wife moved out a few weeks ago. Took the baby. Said she felt second-rate, like I never put her first anymore. She doesn't understand that she's who I'm working *for*, you know?"

"Did you quit your job after she left?"

"Can't. Have too many important clients. If I drop one --BING!-- the whole chain collapses, not just my clients, but all my business contacts too. I'll never find a job again. I don't know what I'd do."

"How is your wife going to live now?"

"I'll give her a good settlement. That is, if she files. Which I'm sure she will." He sips his drink. "You have a scratch on your finger."

"I was opening a can of food for my cat before I went out. Those damn things are sharp after they're cut, and I guess I just wasn't too careful."

"My wife took the cat, too."

"Oh... I'm sorry. What kind of cat was it?"

"Persian. He had papers and everything. How about yours?"

"Abyssinian. I brought him back with me from Egypt."

"I was in Egypt once. Business though. Did you like it?"

"It was beautiful. I stayed a month."

"Really? Pardon me for asking, but... how did you

afford it?"

"Oh, I'm a freelance writer. Conde Nast hired me to do a story, and I liked it so much that I thought I might do a story for myself. Maybe something fictional, set in Alexandria. So I stayed long enough to get a feel for the place. Kind of like Hemingway."

"And did you feel very bohemian?"

"Yes. No. Well, I did then, but then I thought I'd wait until I got home to write anything. And I did, and then I couldn't remember a thing. *Not a thing*. So I never wrote anything."

"Didn't you take any pictures?"

"Yes, but they didn't do anything for me. It was like I was looking at a travel book or something. The experience had been totally wiped out."

"So didn't you have to pay back your publisher?"

"No, I had enough money of my own. They were going to reimburse me when I got back, so I just told them not to bother." I smile at him. "I've also gotten very good settlements."

"You divorced? I'm sorry. Was it rough?"

"After the first few times, I got used to it."

"You were back in court a lot?"

"I guess you could say that. I've had six divorces."

I drink alone for an hour. I watch couples drift in, drift out. I watch singles walk in who leave as couples, and couples who leave as singles. Or couples who become singles and then become couples with someone else.

About nine o'clock, this slick-looking couple strolls in. She could be a model if it weren't for the nose. *Striking* would be the word most people would use. And of course there were the breasts. Of which she has none. But she has no fat anywhere else, either, so naturally I am jealous. And I am enormously pleased when they quarrel, as two good-looking people invariably do, and he makes his way to the bar.

"Gin and tonic, please." For someone whose girlfriend is presently parked in the lap of a man across the bar, he does not appear unusually perturbed. "What are you drinking?"

"Pina colada."

"A pina colada for the lady."

"You look awfully familiar."

"Do you really mean that or is that just your line?"

"No, I really mean it. Have we met?"

"That *does* sound like a line. But I'll be flattered if you really mean it. Do you go to any O-B shows?"

"Yes. Actually, I used to act in them."

"Really? Then we may have met. I just was in *Lady Like November*."

"Now I remember! You played the --uh--"

"Brother-in-law. Yeah, I know, I was really memorable." He finishes his drink. "I just have that face that everyone knows." He does. He reminds me of my father and my priest and my mailman all at once.

"Have you been in anything else?"

"Small shit. Sometimes really bad. *Bring Me an Angel*

sucked. We all knew it, too, but it paid. I did that Central Park Shakespeare thing a few years back. I also do kid's stuff. Anything, you know, just so I can have people say what you just did. That I look familiar."

"I don't remember your name, though."

"Jim."

"Nice to meet you, Jim. I'm Kelley."

"Kelley...I wish I could say I knew you, Kelley, but I really don't think we've met. And I thought I knew everybody in the O-B theatre."

"I did O-B a long time ago. Now I do regional, stuff in the Catskills, workshops, stuff like that."

"That's cool."

"Yeah, I like it."

"See that blonde over there?" he asks, nodding towards the model, who is presently cavorting with an obese man who keeps trying to feel the hollow folds in her blouse.

"Yeah?"

"I'm crazy about her. But she drives me crazy. She does shit like this on purpose, trying to get me jealous, pissing me off just so she can try to tease me back later." He sighs. "So what can you do?"

"Leave her."

"Christ, I can't do that. I mean, look at her. How could I find someone like that again? And the sex, well, if you don't mind my being frank, the sex is incredible."

"Do you talk..I mean, try to talk to her about it?"

"We talk, and then we do the same thing again. It's just her way."

"I don't know what to tell you, Jim."

"Is that a scratch on the side of your nose?"

I touch it. "Probably. My cat."

"Your cat scratches your nose?"

"Jim, this is a VERY VICIOUS cat."

"Kelley?"

"Yes?"

"You are a VERY DRUNK person."

"Me? No."

"Would you like me to take you home?"

"I don't think so, Jim. My husband may not like it."

The clock behind the bar says 1:24, but I am in a position to take issue with it. I am in a position to take issue with anything. I am Shelob, I am Yin, I am the dark spider of Mirkwood forest, waiting to ensnare someone in my web.

"St. Pauli Girl." Here he is, last one of the night. I find I've run out of creative opening lines.

"Nice suit."

"Thank you." He continues drinking, doesn't retort back.

"Isn't that Armani?"

"Yes, yes it is." He doesn't offer to buy me a drink, so I get one on my own.

"White Russian, please."

The silence between us is thick and heavy, like a bad fog. Like my White Russian. I swirl it around in the glass, but make no motion to drink it. He finally resigns himself

to speak to me.

"How'd you get yourself so scratched up?"

"Cat." I'm feeling pretty surly by now; this guy seems to want to take control. I don't like that.

"I hope it was your own cat. Or one that you knew. You can get cat-scratch fever that way, you know."

"What are you--a doctor or something?"

"Yes, I am. And it's my night for free advice."

"What else do you give out for free?"

He tosses a bill on the bar to cover his drink and gets up. "I know your type," he says, "and pretty soon you're going to start asking me if I cheat on my wife and telling me that your name is Gigi or Lana or something like that. And God knows whatever else. You're very drunk. I would not advise you to try and drive home. Though I'm sure you have an apartment close by. Your type usually does."

I try to toss my drink at him but miss. Actually, I slide off the bar stool. He helps me back onto it. "Call a friend," he says. "Tell them to come get you. Don't take any sleeping pills or aspirin--in your state you'll slip into a coma. And thank you for trying to be entertaining, but I'm going home to bed. By myself."

He walks out. "There's a good one left yet, Danny!" I say to the bartender.

"I'll say. Hey, I'm ready to close. You wanna go home?"

"Got nowhere else to go, do I?"

He smiles. "Jen, you always have someplace to go." He begins to wipe the bar. "God, I love those stories you give them."

"Did you make a lot in tips?"

"Yeah, I did great. Better even than last week. Thanks a lot. You sure know how to milk a customer."

"I try."

He chuckles to himself. "You know, you really should've been an actress or something. I mean it. You could've been in movies, had people write books about you, all that sort of thing. Did you ever think about that, Jen? About being an actress?" He pauses, then strains his voice to a Southern falsetto. "I have always depended upon the kindness of strangers--"

"Danny--"

"Yeah?" He realizes that I am not laughing, and instantaneously the funhouse mask falls. "Are you gonna be sick or something?"

"No." I don't explain. I am not sober enough to understand it quite myself, and surely not coherent enough to tell someone else.

"Wanna split the profits?" he asks. "We'll go out to dinner."

"We'll see," I say. "But you heard what the doc said. Right now what I need is a friend to take me home."

"Want me to walk you?"

"After what I did for you? Damn right." I get up, slowly. The bar stool is warm. I watch Danny put the chairs up, shut off all the lights.

"Hurry up," I say. "I have to go home and feed the cat." §

OUT OF THE WOODS

Sometimes I wander alone
In the cold dense forest seeing
Trees undress themselves.

I become jittery
And look away toward the worn path.

The leaves crunch as I walk
Back to join the others

Knowing
I'll never survive
In the forest
Alone.

KATE ROE

TO THE MAKER OF CHICKEN SOUP

They lined the walls with Indians on
The floor where you will surely die.
Your flowers wilted from lack of sun,
Though I was sure I perched them high

Upon the sill. They're moving you
This week, they say, to another ward
Where all the patients are just like you.
Terminal? I wonder, or bored

Of weeks of being stuck by nurses
Who are afraid you're contagious
And cower from you. The doc says
Only a few more weeks, and just

One more operation and you're through.
Through with what? To hell with them all.
I'm giving them a picture of you
And making them hang it on the wall.

MELANIE O'DONNELL

SNEEZING AMONG THE MORNING GLORIES

Nonchalantly at the table
eating coffee, drinking cheese
she asks me if I've ever had
a lover that could make me sneeze.

Silky chocolate fills my cup;
Don't look, she says and strokes my hand.
She climbs into my velvet space
and whispers she can understand

every subtle ruffled need
residing in my cardboard lap;
instinctively, I grab her skirt
and in its fish and flowers wrap

blinking eyes and marbled skies;
the putty stuff that clogs my brain.
She lifts the hem above her breast
and pours the tumult down the drain.

She lays my head upon a pillow
folds my arms across my chest,
rubs my feet with camphor oil,
lies beside me, gets undressed.

We dream of trees, green and gold
weeping blue beside a river
couches, drapes, and tapestries
violent, thick and full of quiver.

She steals beneath the persian rug
hides our letters in the wall
wakes me with a feather kiss
cocoon herself within a shawl.

Seeing brightly hearing cold,
I try to reach her in her tomb,
my fingers scare away her skin
safe within a black lace womb.

Through a slit I see her face,
she's smiling as she was before;
I beg with chocolate, plead with tea,
she still remains upon the floor.

Spreading out her arms for me,
I curl between her breasts and knees,
A garden blossoms hip to hip,
the morning glory makes me sneeze.

TRACY YOEELS

GEORGIA MAPLE

Maple leaf of red and blue,
Georgia first to claim your hue.
Burning desire, like the brilliant fire.
Different than the oak trees do.

Maple leaf in black and white,
Still, to conceal the starry night.
I walk alone, not near home
Under the whorled umbrella. No light.

Maple leaf of white and blue,
Do people know what they do?
They have said; we are led
away from sense without a clue.

Maple leaf in blue and red,
Lake George freezing in my head.
Icy heat. Brush and palette meet
with color, on the canvas wed.

TIM WILLIAMS

ANTS

Big black size eleven shoes pound the ground
in a thunderous rhythm of busy.
BOOM BOOM to the bottom of my soles shake
the street and shake the black ants at my feet.
They move about their important business
as I do my own, step light around the light
Creatures die beneath the weight of the weighty
Do not watch them carry their dead away...

HARVEST

Trying to find the way home
(but really looking for some
other place, a common ground)
we drive through seeded cornfields
in his dusty red pick-up.

"You're too far away," he says
and pulls over at the edge
of a broken bridge. Opening
his rusted door, breathing deep,
he smiles at me. I laugh.

I follow him as he leads
the way. We take cautious steps,
being careful not to look
down for fear of falling.
Holding hands again, we're safe.

He says, "We could follow those
double yellow lines 'til the
road stops, if that's what it takes."
But I'm tired of driving, and
We've already crossed the bridge.

KIMBERLY KINNEY

THE SNOWSTORM

(A memory of winters past when we really did have snow in Minersville, PA.)

The
Watching

Yearning

.....waiting.....
.....Pressing fingertips to the frosted pane of window glass--

I sure hope it comes tonight !

There two sisters sit, tiny fingers crossed tight
Have you finished your homework yet ?

(Sigh) Not quite.

Overnight-
The mighty miracle of wonderous winter white
Arrives suddenly in a whirlwind of beauty.

Still.

Baba brushes the snowflakes from her shoulders as she comes in laughing from the cold
A foot-- at least!

(For once the weatherman was right.)

STEPHANIE KRAMER

WHITE

KAREN RUDUSKI

There was a horrible rasping noise that inflicted pain as it echoed inside his head. His aching eyes expanded to match his state of astonishment as he exposed them to his luminous surroundings. There was nothing to his world but the simple color of white.

The rasping seemed to remain alive in his mind but he realized it was not so. There now seemed to be an object in the distance from where the rasping noise came, something like a mirror. He stumbled in its direction. The object was almost too unreal to be true, as if it were just drawn into place: the lining was sketch-like with shadows and shades for definition. He stepped in the direction of the glass in an attempt to catch his image.

Though he could see the mirror before him, he felt blind as he could not see any reflection. The rasping noise returned, and along with the echoes he had become familiar with, he felt a vigorous shaking of his world. He squeezed his eyes tight to fight the echoes and braced his body for defense against the shaking. And then everything was silent and still. He opened his eyes to be staring at himself.

His appearance was beyond any explanation. He was outlined in the same manner as the mirror that showed his face; shadows and shades defined his facial features. His hair was slightly messed, but as he ran his hand over its smooth and icy surface, it remained untouched. A chill went up his spine.

He cowardly held his hands over his face, afraid again to look at his reflection. When he withdrew his hands, he was still avoiding the image in front of him. He inhaled deeply to overcome the anxiety of gazing at his double. Looking down at his hands, palms up, he discovered dark smudge marks. A great uncertainty came over him, forcing him to look in the mirror once again. He stared hard while the image stared back. Something was unusual. His face ached and seemed to have lost some of the structure it had earlier. The areas that were once well shaded were now lighter. But Why? He looked down at his hands to find his answer.

Dazed, he turned quickly, leaving his image behind. There were so many questions in his mind, but no way of finding the answers to them. His head ached and he was emotionally exhausted.

This was the last thing he remembered. When he awoke, his world still remained a simple white, but he somehow gained color. He felt awkward about the change, and knew something was not right. He couldn't explain the sudden fear that he was in danger of his existence being wiped out.

He didn't see it coming until it was too late and his destruction was directly above his head. He could feel the weight of the massacring object on him. He could hear the horrible rasping noise that he remembered echoing in his head. He could feel the heat from the friction above him and then the pain of his body as it began to be rubbed viciously and without mercy. His skin was being pressed together and then stretched apart until most of it had worn away. He screamed and yelled as loud as he could for as long as he could before his mouth was erased from existence.

Katie entered the den. Sitting at the coffee-table was her baby brother Joey, arms extended toward her, proudly showing off his coloring of her picture. Katie disgustedly shoved him out of the room. She grabbed her pencil, opposite position in her hand for writing, and furiously began to erase her drawing.

A faint scream could be heard beneath the rasping of her pencil if one were to listen for it. §

BLACKBEARD

I'm counting my gold:
placing my coins gingerly

one
by
one

into countless little trays of balances and scales encircling me

one coin	for the anger and despair of my sister loversplink
one coin	dishwater up to my elbowsplink
one	for the books I have to read,
one	for the books I have to writeplinkplink
one coin	for the music of the world I have yet to hearplink
one coin	you interrupt my

counting by stroking between my shoulderblades so lightly with your
fingertips that I
shiver

and drop my gold

sending thousands of glittering discs into the air

suspended
glittering surrounding
shimmering like leaves on a golden tree, they

fall
scattering across my scales
crashing my balances
and my ship

sinks

TRACY YUELLS

TWO TALKING BALLERINAS

Smoking a joint,
early preparation for an audition.
Sara pointed out how small my dance bag was
compared to my overnight bag.

My dance bag contained:
four pairs of point shoes,
two of my favorite black leotards, that pulled sufficiently over my botton,
two pairs of pink mesh tights,
a razor, rubber bands,
hair pins.
All were neatly placed, controlled.

The other bag
contained life's necessary equipment.
Mr. Bong -- my best buddy,
three sandwich bags of bright green buds
flown in from Hawaii especially for the occasion,
half a gallon jug of cheap peach wine,
two bottles of dry white wine,
and tequila.
All
To be consumed within one weekend in Boston.
It is difficult to neatly arrange bottles in a duffel bag,
They move around so much
making it uncomfortable to carry.

Earlier that day, Sara and I had played cards.
Poker was our favorite on tense days, everydays,
like todays. Amazing how I always pick up
when I ought to put down,
cards, that is.

Anxiously awaiting another important event in my life
that would have no significant effect on my poker strategies,
mustering up the energy to continue--

I was much harder to carry than either of my bags,
upheaval pressing against my eggshell protection.

ROSE ANN SERPICO

DEATH IS YOUR CHILDREN'S INGENUITY

The Wind and the water call to me,
 beneath the layers of fraud that I wear.
So sad that a man of nature must set his work against it
 and labor to become its master.

From my skull concrete thick, to my feet guarded
 from the earth by the street, and shielded from the pavement by my shoes.
See me! A fool who needs protection from his own ingenuity.

Have pity on us Mother Earth.
Your children have disowned you and try to make you their slave.
See us! Parasites, satisfying our hungers on the blood of our mother;
 stealing her life to pay for our own.

And our children we will abandon.
See them. Orphans in a lonely world, living
 beneath a shadow of despair...

SNIPER
(EXCERPT)

PRODUCED AT THE ADAM HILL THEATRE CO., W. HOLLYWOOD, CA, OCT., 92-FEB., 93.

BONNIE C. BEDFORD

TIME: November, 1976; eleven months after VACCARO'S arrest. The "real time" events occur the night before and the day he is to stand trial. He reenacts various times of his childhood and adolescence.

SCENE: The stage represents the mind of ANTHONY VACCARO. There is a small bed, table, and four chairs slightly stage left. The bare stage becomes the home, town, school, streets, and jail cell of VACCARO. The stage should be draped in black wing curtains. Actors use a minimum of hand props to signify scene and time changes.

AT RISE: The stage is plunged into blackness. When lights come back up, TONY VACCARO, dressed in green Army fatigue jacket, blue jeans, and white T-shirt, is seated onstage. As he delivers the following speech, a gunshot is heard for each of his twenty-five counts in the numbering of his "confession." VACCARO remains facing the audience, retelling that day and reacting to the sounds of the rifle firing in the background.

VACCARO: (Speaking quietly, carefully. As VACCARO delivers the monologue, the other characters enter and hold poses facing him, listening intently. MCNAMARA/ MACKENZIE/ MACK LEWIS enters first and sits at desk and records the speech. CHIEF is behind him. JOHN and LOUISE VACCARO stand on either side of VACCARO, but outside the jail space. SUSAN JAMISON stands up left.)

They ask me what I was thinking of that day? What T.V. shows did I watch? Did I read about Vietnam? Did I listen to rock music? What did I see when I pulled the trigger?

(Pausing)

I told them. Roses. They opened up like roses. Not the tight closed in kind you get at the florist. No. More like the red fat ones my mom used for my birthday cake when I was a kid. Twenty-five shots. Fifteen open buds.

(Pausing, then speaking more cautiously.)

Mr. Alexander was number one. I asked him twice to give me the keys, but he just stood there staring at my gun. He never stopped looking at it.

(brief pause)

I laid the shells out on the window sill in the classroom. Twenty-four. One o'clock. Two women came out of Bachman's Department Store across the street. I watched them through my scope until they were inside a blue Ford facing me.

(Reliving it slightly)

The younger one reached down to put the keys in the ignition, and I gave her number two. Tricky shot. Through the windshield, down through the steering wheel and into her belly. She jerked upward and grabbed at the blossom growing there.

(Hesitates, catches his breath and goes on, troubled for a second by that shot.)

I caught her between the eyes with three. She fell back into the headrest. The older woman started screaming. I mean, she looked like she was. Her mouth stayed open until I gave her number four right behind her right ear. A guy in a denim jacket pulled up in front of their car. He saw the shattered windshield probably, because he never looked in my direction. He stepped out into number five and dropped next to his pickup. Plenty of time to reload. An old lady came around the corner of Pine... pushing a shopping cart.

(Embarrassed)

I must have pulled up on that one because I only grazed the top of her head. She fell down and started screaming. A man driving past pulled over and ran to help her. He rolled them both up next to his car, so I couldn't get a bead on either of them.

(Pausing)

At seven and eight, I almost quit. A kid, twelve-years-old, rode in from the other end of Pine. The man shouted at him to turn back. But he just stopped. He had a Weekly Press bag over one arm. I squeezed off number seven just as he tried to pedal away. It slammed into his shoulder and threw him off his bike. He scrambled sideways, like a crab, trying to drag his papers with him. Then, he looked up, and I saw his face... just for an instant in the scope. I thought it was Jimmy Decker. A neighbor kid I used to babysit. I must have pulled up squeezing number eight because it took the top of his head. I didn't mean for that. In my hometown, I hadn't counted on knowing any of them.

(Reportage once more)

I was loading nine when I heard the first sirens.

(Incredulous)

Somebody called the fire department. The fire department. The first truck charged into the parking lot between the school and Bachman's. I took out the driver as he spun in towards me but somehow his partner grabbed the wheel and stopped the truck before he ducked down where I couldn't see him before I let number ten into the cab. Eleven left and quick twelve right into the guys who came around the rear of the truck. Reload. No movement. No sound.

(Breathing harder)

The fireman in the truck must've called on the radio because I heard more sirens coming to us then. Chief Rollin's car pulled in at the south end of Pine and the State troopers roared in on the North. Somehow they got the idea that I was up on top of Bachman's because the next thing I know, people are running out of the store into the parking lot. Straight at me. Turning around and looking back up at the store roof.

(Shaking his head)

They evacuated the store...

(Pause)

I lost count for a while. Loading and reloading as fast as I could and driving them down into the crowd. It wasn't too long before they all turned, kinda like a wave, and looked up and pointed at me. I heard Chief Rollins on the squad car loudspeaker ordering them all back into Bachman's. He pulled his car down the street to corrdon off the area and the Troopers planted theirs at the other end. I could see just the tops of their hats down behind their cars, talking to each other on the radios. They were out of my range. Chief Rollins had his field glasses out, checking out the school.

(Pause)

The crowd left wounded behind on the tarmac. I used up some more shots, keeping one of the State Troopers pinned behind a parked car when he tried to reach a lady who was yelling for help.

(Calculated)

Five shells left. Nothing moving. Most of the wounded had managed to crawl near a car so I didn't see much.

(Remembering)

Then... Chief Rollins jumps into his police car and backs out of sight onto Academy Street and I hear this low grinding and whirring sound. Couldn't figure out what it was until I see a tank. You know one of the two that sits on the Armory lawn. It turns the corner and hits two parked cars and just keeps coming, pushing one of the cars ahead of it until it just kind of squirts off to the side. I sent two quick shots into the tank's front; they just zinged off. The turret turned in my direction and I grabbed at the last three shells and braced. But I guess the Armory doesn't have live ammo.

(Summarizing)

I watched them move the wounded out of the parking lot, crouched behind the tank. Volunteer firemen walked next to it, I found out later.

(Pausing)

I waited and I saw the church tower just above the roofline of Bachman's Store. I put my last three shells into the tower. The wood splintered and peeled. No roses there.

(Pausing)

Dr. Fredricks or McKenzie, I don't remember which, asked me why I thought of roses. "Roses bloom outward," he said and showed me some of the autopsy pictures.

(Quietly)

These went inward. In. In. Every one of them.§





THE IDEAL CAREER: (PARODY OR PROPHECY?)

ERIC RIVIERA

A tastefully presented woman at a well furnished office desk finishes up a call. The young secretary can not yet be heard (probably uninteresting dialogue anyway), but we are aware of some noise. Opposite her, sitting sheepishly in the corner of the room, a grinning, portfolio clenching man raises his eyebrows at her hopefully. Clad in a cheap suit, Mr. Hackette nervously taps his even cheaper shoes to an unidentifiable beat.

SECRETARY (*hanging up the phone*):

Mr. Stifstien will see you now, Dave.

Mr. Hackette bounds up to his feet, and ceremoniously bangs his head twice on the secretary's desk. Despite the toppling pictures and office supplies, the secretary broadens her smile with authentic fondness.

HACKETTE (*fixing his hair*):

Ah, yes. Superstition. Ever since I sold that one Different Strokes teleplay, I've been bashing my brains for good luck. You know there's a story behind that, don't you Joan?

SECRETARY:

You tripped on some paperclips in your old agent's office and smashed your head on his desk.

HACKETTE:

Good, good. And the second lump came from...

SECRETARY:

...the desk falling on you while you were trying to get up.

HACKETTE:

Very impressive...but, I'll be hurt if you don't remember the only reason I actually sold that teleplay.

SECRETARY (*now turning to him enthusiastically*):

Afraid of a lawsuit, the agent pulled a few strings and had NBC use it for the show...on the condition that he pay for its production himself!

HACKETTE:

I never said it better. What do you think, Joan? You think today's the day I sell a screenplay?

SECRETARY:

You don't have a chance in hell, Dave.

HACKETTE:

Yeah, probably right. Must be hitting my head too hard, huh?

She smiles and nods in response.

HACKETTE (*turning the knob to the producer's office*):

Why do you think Stifstien always wants to have these pitching sessions if he knows that he'll never produce my ideas in his wildest sexual nightmares?

SECRETARY (*theatrical pause*):

The same reason I get your calls through to him...no matter how miserable we are, any day of the year, you are there to remind us that our lives are comparably rich and fulfilled.

HACKETTE (*shaking his index finger at the Secretary*):

You know, one day I'm gonna find someone who does the same thing for me. And even if it's a man, I'm gonna marry it.

He opens the door. Immediately, we hear some chuckling coming from inside the room. At his desk, Mr. Stifstien grins towards the camera with anticipation and glee. When he knows it is Hackette, he doubles over in laughing. He stifles the laugh with his hand and stops it with a long, drawn out throat clearing.

STIFSTIEN:

Mr. Hackette! I just finished talking with the story analyst on the last script you gave us.

HACKETTE:

How was the rewrite?

STIFSTIEN:

Incredible!

HACKETTE:

Great! I'm glad that I'm finally--

STIFSTIEN:

Absolutely nothing salvageable from the entire script. Can't do a thing with it. The characters, the plot, the dialogue...everything! An example of perfect, unmitigated failure.

HACKETTE (*theatrical pause*):

I admit, it needs some work.

Stifstien gets up from his desk with a hearty, continuous laugh. He goes over to Hackette and gives him a few friendly slaps on the cheek.

STIFSTIEN:

Always the optimist! I wish all of my writers were like you.

HACKETTE:

I wish I was one of your writers.

STIFSTIEN:

Sorry, kid! With today's economy being the way it is, it's getting harder and harder to pay someone that don't pay back. Have a seat, though. It's great to see ya!

He does and Stifstien follows suit. For one profound moment, smiling Stifstien regards Hackette with disinterested eyes.

HACKETTE:

Ever since I was a kid, the silver screen captivated me. Perfect stories told by perfect people in a whirlpool of color and light. I grew up thinking that I could indeed contribute to the magic of recorded drama, and baptize my audience with my name in lights. But, no fantasy of livelihood can be achieved with wishing. I accepted the hard times ahead of me.

(theatrical pause)

Four years the English major, and two years struggling in USC's scripting course. I've studied the biz inside and out, swearing to myself that I'd never accept a teaching job. And even now, I'm proud to say, no one has ever learned shit from me!

STIFSTIEN:

Hackette--the Hollywood dream fleshed out! Your name is a tremendous tribute to the struggling artists of America.

HACKETTE (*voice raised considerably, one side of his face suddenly collapses out of the aching grin*):

They don't know my fucking name, Dan! How can they when my only screen credit is buried in reruns that most of middle America is trying to forget? I'm working my ass off! I type 'til my tendons melt every minute I get a chance from my day job.

STIFSTIEN:

They're so good to you at the sanitation department. You should never leave them.

HACKETTE:

I didn't come to California to clean the trash off its streets! I haven't been dealing with earthquakes and gang riots because I feel that it builds character! They burned my apartment down, did I tell you that?

STIFSTIEN:

But you have the gift of the pitch, you see? What was that story you were trying to sell the other week?

HACKETTE:

You mean about the evil spirit that takes over the souls of dieters and makes them eat macadamia nuts?

STIFSTIEN:

Yeah! Scary stuff! I was so surprised that no one would invest. I thought I saw a hit coming.

HACKETTE:

After ten years of zero payback, I'm starting to think that I never had any talent.

STIFSTIEN:

Talent! Everyone has talent. My mother...has talent. But you, you have charisma! You have your foot in the door while every other schmuck needs an agent.

HACKETTE:

I haven't sold anything, goddamn it!

STIFSTIEN:

So, you're a little unlucky. Such is very forgivable.

Mr. Hackette leans back in his chair and takes an UZI out of his portfolio. He aims it at Stifstien.

STIFSTIEN (*raising his hands*):

Hey! When did you buy a gun?

HACKETTE:

I didn't. I stole it from some Crip that was breaking into my apartment. Not before he killed my dog and my goldfish.

STIFSTIEN:

He shot your fish?

HACKETTE:

Well, actually he shot my dog. I panicked and threw the bowl at him.

STIFSTIEN:

Wow! There's definitely a story in that!

HACKETTE (*raving*):

Well if there is, I would certainly be the one to turn it into crap! I can't go on like this. I'm not going to spend another day in this stinking city, scrounging for any kind of writing position. I'm not going to waste another ounce of my education licking the asses of you overpaid film fucks!

STIFSTIEN:

Is that what I am to you? Some corporate bimbo who's only reason for succeeding is luck and obscure business connections?

HACKETTE:

Yes! But, I wouldn't kill you for that. In fact, I'm not going to kill you at all.

STIFSTIEN:

And still, that gun seems awfully threatening...

HACKETTE:

Relax, Dan. Put you hands down. I'll tell you why I brought the gun--I want you to kill me!

STIFSTIEN (*theatrical pause*):

Damn. I had no idea how you really felt. Jesus, Dave...you know this isn't the way! You're young, you have the drive of the artist! People would kill to have your tenacity. So what if you never sold anything? Paychecks don't make you a true writer. And after so many years in the biz, I know your type when I see it: The Late Bloomer. Yeah! You hear about them all the time. One minute they're driving a cab, the next minute, BANG! they're directing their own movie. Lightning's just waiting to strike, Dave. I can feel it!

HACKETTE (*theatrical pause*):

What a steaming pile of horseshit!

STIFSTIEN:

Yeah, I guess it is.

HACKETTE:

I've been feeding myself those same tired lines for years! And it's time now to punch out!

STIFSTIEN:

Why do you want me to kill you?

Hackette cocks his weapon and stands.

HACKETTE:

As the only producer disturbed enough to let me into his office, you are responsible for all those sleepless nights I've wasted typing out high-concept scripts. Every single time I finish, I stare at myself in the mirror and say, "You did it, boy! You've created a hit!" And every time you sit there and tell me that nobody in the universe wants to buy it!?. So, I want you to splatter my brains before they make me type another word...Free me! You're the only one who can do it.

Mr. Hackette relaxes his grip on the UZI, letting the muzzle swing towards him. He holds it out towards Mr. Stifstien. Mr. Stifstien stands up and walks around to the front of the desk.

STIFSTIEN:

C'mon, Dave! Let's talk about this.

HACKETTE:

If you don't take this gun right now, I'll kill you and shoot myself instead. To tell you the truth, the alternative would satisfy me just as much.

STIFSTIEN:

What about the law? How could I possibly get away with killing you?

HACKETTE:

Just tell the cops that I went crazy, took out an automatic and attempted to open fire.

STIFSTIEN:

There's no physical evidence. They'd never buy it.

Mr. Hackette suddenly grabs Stifstien's shirt by the collar and pulls down with all his strength. After ripping the shirt and wrenching his suit, Hackette proceeds to swiftly smack Stifstien across the face with the gun. Mr. Stifstien falls onto his desk and braces himself just before plummeting over the other side.

HACKETTE:

Physical evidence.

Mr. Stifstien feebly feels for his leather swivel-chair and leans into it. He bobs his head towards Hackette's direction and attempts to catch his breath.

STIFSTIEN:

O.K. Hackette. I'll do it. I hate to see a writer in pain.

Mr. Hackette smiles and gently places the UZI on Stifstien's desk. Stifstien takes the gun and studies it for a moment. He draws in a long, deep breath and releases it in thought. He slowly raises the gun up and aims it for Hackette's head.

STIFSTIEN:

Incidentally, could you stand in front of the window? That would be the easiest to replace.

Mr. Hackette complies.

HACKETTE:

Yeah! Easy to replace! There'll always be another writer, huh Dan?

STIFSTIEN:

The surest bet in this town!

HACKETTE:

All right, I'm ready. Send my soul out of this filthy fucking town. Maybe I'll come back as an agent.

STIFSTIEN:

Goodbye, Dave. I'm sure gonna miss you.

The next moment is spent as a point of view shot. From Hackette's eyes, we see the producer tighten his grip. Slowly, the gun fills the field of vision. The barrel gets bigger and bigger, the blackness starting to overcome the scene, blacker and blacker until..."Click."

Hackette's eyes twist out of a squint and into a look of surprised puzzlement.

HACKETTE:

Is it jammed?

STIFSTIEN:

No, I don't think so. It's...

(frantically releasing the cartridge)

...empty!

HACKETTE:

Holy shit! THAT SONUVABITCH UNLOADED AN ENTIRE CLIP INTO MY DACHSHUND?! What kind of a world is this?!

Stifstien shrugs his shoulders, bewildered by the current situation. He seems to be in some form of shock. Hackette shakes his head and picks up his portfolio. He turns around and heads towards the door.

HACKETTE:

Well, I guess I'll leave. You can keep the gun. I don't think I have the guts to buy bullets for it anyway.

STIFSTIEN (*coming out of his trance*):

Wait!

HACKETTE:

What?

STIFSTIEN:

This was great! I loved this scene!

HACKETTE:

Scene?

STIFSTIEN:

Yes! My God! It was--so real! If you could work it into a full-fledged story, if you could make it breathe, you could get that hit! My hair's standing on end. The lightning has struck!

Hackette stares out the window for a moment. A smile flashes across his lips.

HACKETTE:

You really think so?

STIFSTIEN:

I've never been so sure about a hunch in all my life!

Hackette's eyes light up and start to jolt in random directions. He simply can't resist. He turns around cracks his knuckles.

HACKETTE:

When should I start?

Off in the distance, within the view of Stifstien's office window, we see another writer leap from the ledge of a nearby building. As he falls in slow motion, pages from a few of his screenplays explode in a burst of chaotic stationery. He screams in glory as he nears the ground, traveling past the stoic stories of an executive building. About 10 feet from the ground, we...

blackout

...just in time to hear a lifeless thud and the fluttering of hundreds of unproduced pages.§

TURQUOISE AND DUST

Navajo woman stirs the sea of turquoise
in her lap,
thinking of her brother tribes:

Nootka, Salish, Chinook.

The stones feel good
against the weathered skin of her crooked hands.
The Eagle soars high.
A gentle wind.

Ute, Shoshoni, Paiute.

She selects her stones.
She likes the old ones
that carry the rusted marks of age
in their pores.
Earth and sky.

Lakota, Arapaho, Comanche.

Her art is her ceremony,
A prayer to Wakan Tonka.
She carves her stones with hammer and chisel.
Her shapes are round.
Each clink a tiny stitch holding
the sacred hoop of the nation-
power of the Great Spirit,
Freedom.

Pawnee, Apache, Sioux.

She does not use the silver
bought on the market to set her stones.
It is not the silver made by the elders
from Mexican pesos and American coins.
She strings her work
on circles of leather,
ties her spirit into each knot,
an offering to the ghost winds.

Cherokee, Seneca, Mohegan.

Her sons sell her prayers
to tourists for bread money.
Wampum.

Mohawk, Abenaki, Iroquois.

She braids ceremonial feathers
into the hair of the little ones.
They dance in circles.
Scream of the hawk.
They only play dress-up.

Trail of Tears, Sand Creek Massacre, Trip of Sorrows,
The Long Walk.

The world is not round.

Indian.

The sacred hoop breaks.
The power dies,
trapped in the square boxes of museums.

Reservations.

Black Elk cries.

KIMBERLY KINNEY

A MORNING IN BUCK SEASON

At five a.m., you're seated beneath
a pine tree
waiting for the sun to rise.
The snow is light, the grass reaches through
it; the silence
is deep.

You watch the woods turn pink, and
then orange.
Occasional chirps and snaps
remind you to keep your rifle near your
face into
the sights

until you see first the nose,
the velvet
of his eye, then the ivory
of the trophy, cradled between the soft,
inverted hearts of
his ears.

He almost poses while you squeeze
the trigger.
The recoil of the stock makes you
thankful for the pine support behind you.
As you watch him
fall through

squinted eyes, you taste victory
rising in
the back of your throat, and
fire several rounds into the air, then charge down
the hill to claim
your prize.

He is beautiful. You crouch by
his belly,
and with your favorite knife, begin
the long incision from front to back. Your
knife meets no
resistance

and the steam that escapes is
warmer than
the coffee you drank before.
Quickly, you empty the carcass, careful
not to break the
stomach

or intestines. Standing up,
the brightness
of the woods momentarily
dizzies you. You lift the hind legs and just
below the knee
you pierce

the hide, muscle, and tendon between
the slender
bones, and feed a clothesline through
the hole. The only blood appears on the rope. Now,
like a child on
a sled,

the deer has to be pulled up
the hill, and
like a parent, you avoid
the rocks and stumps that jut out of the snow,
weaving a safe
path home.

TRACY YOEUELLS

SEASONS

In the beginning,
Our feelings soar beyond the red and orange
 Leaves of Mt. Washington
Miniaturizing the fear of the inevitable
Fall.

We greet long days
With desire, dealing intense
Euphoric touches with gentle wisps of
Fingers.

By the return of green leaves on Mt. Washington,
The lust has disintegrated
Dropping our battered hearts among the abundant
Foliage.

Today, starting new with another,
Feelings tread lightly along the mountain's path
Hoping to prevent that painful
Fall.

KATE ROE

WAKING WILKES-BARRE

The warmth of the rising sun
Falls on the face of the city.
She stirs in her sleep.
One eye breaks open
Stares at the new day
Then in protest snaps shut.

She stretches
 s t r e t c h e s
And yawns.

Sleepy bones pop,
Muscles grumble in feigned surprise
At being woken.

Eyes blink open,
Tongue clicks against teeth.
She scratches her hair
 Awake now,
And instinctively glances
At the city clock.

She laughs.
It hasn't worked in years.

ED MCGINNIS

TO HOMEWARD

BOB BALLENTINE

Before he stepped onto the number twenty-five bus, the bus he always took home from the mall, David paused long enough to inhale one deep breath of early spring air--warm, with just a faint trailing edge of winter chill. All day people had been coming into the store saying how beautiful the weather was outside, and although he was catching just the tail end of its promise of spring, his solar plexus still tugged with the old animal joy: had he been a deer, he would have leaped about, butting other young bucks with his horns. After working for six years selling athletic footwear (he had learned long ago not to call them "sneakers"), however, the true source of his elation was the knowledge that he was almost done setting up for the big spring sale. David had been working hard to get the store ready, although his part in the whole thing was pretty small--little more than pushing displays around. The store was part of a chain, so when something big was up the district manager would come in with his future spinster of an assistant and tell the manager what to do; he in turn would tell David what to do, and the result would be their Big Spring Spectacular Sale. Every year David referred to it as "Operation Barbarossa," after the German spring offensive in Russia in World War II, but the other sales clerks--teenagers all--didn't get the joke.

Jenny was still at the Sew n'Stuff across from the Friendly's (the mall had two Sew n'Stuffs; the other was wedged between the Radio Shack and the Schatz), in another one of the many wings of the mall radiating like the strand of a web whose center was the Food Court. The Sew n'Stuff that Jenny co-managed was three web-strands north of the strand that held The Coach's Corner. Jenny would work until nine and be home by ten. David would wait for her, perhaps reading some Joseph Campbell or Bruce Catton, and would start her dinner about nine-thirty. He had done this every night he came home before her since their marriage. Jenny had already been working at the mall for two years when they married; David had quit graduate school before their marriage and took the job at the store as soon as they returned from their honeymoon. It was the right decision: jobs in teaching history were so scarce, he'd probably end up a salesman somewhere anyway. At least this way he'd have a secure managerial position, without the humiliation of a useless Master's or even a PhD stuck away in a drawer. He had hated graduate school, anyway: the history department's graduate program seemed more interested in theory than in history--all Foucault and feminism and no Charlemagne or Gettysburg. He felt more and more alien with each semester, until, in the spring of the second year of his Master's during the space of one week, a lesbian separatist shouted at him at a party that his use of the term "mankind" was a form of rape, and a professor took five points off the grade on his midterm exam because he had used the term "blind" to describe the

Allies' treatment of Germany at Versailles, a term which, the professor said, was an insult to the visually challenged. It was at that point that David decided that he could take no more, and he stopped attending classes and did not register for the next fall. A friend who had quit the English Department to take a job at Computerland told David about the opening at The Coach's Corner, and the rest, as David would say every time he related his story, was history.

In any case, it was nice that both David and Jenny worked at the mall, since they could have lunch or shop together when their shifts overlapped. So: six springs of marriage to Jenny, and six springs of selling sneakers. It was, he smiled to himself, all part of growing up. And it was safer than the University.

The bus was nearly empty, as it usually was at this part of the run, most of the passengers getting off, only a few getting on. David sat in his usual seat: the first seat facing forward on the left-hand side. He liked the space this seat gave his legs, and it had the added bonus of a signal strip right next to his ear, so he didn't have to reach around other people to signal his stop. After six years he hardly needed to signal, though: the bus drivers knew him; they always exchanged a pleasant hello when he got on, and David always made sure to say thank you when he got off. It satisfied him to know that he was being courteous to the bus driver--after working in a store for six years he knew how rude people could be. Another advantage to sitting on this side today was the warm afternoon sun coming in the windows. It felt good on David's face, and the heavy, scratched glass filtered out all hints of winter.

A girl ran out of the mall entrance and onto the bus just as it was pulling away. She panted and her cheeks were flushed as she smiled an embarrassed smile at the bus driver. He said something to her that David didn't catch, but it must have been a pleasantry of some sort because her smile broadened and softened, as if his comment had reassured her that she was forgiven.

The girl sat in the seat directly opposite David, which pleased him because she seemed pretty and he wanted to look at her more closely. She was in pink, lots of pink; maybe too much--it made her too girlish. Her long, quilted coat was soiled along the hem, the white synthetic fur matted, the pink nylon grayish. Soon, David thought, the girls will be wearing shorts and halters and summer dresses. A mixed blessing: all that sex--or at least the potential for sex--and none of it for him. Of course he'd never been much with women anyway--too shy, he supposed. But now seemed worse, the frustration. At least he had a wife to make love with. When they did. It never seemed frequent enough now, although it had before they were married.

And now Jenny had gone off the pill, even though they

weren't planning to have a baby yet. She just suddenly decided to switch to natural family planning. Her mother had sent her a packet from some Catholic group that sponsored it. There were pamphlets and a big hard-cover book explaining the whole thing: ejaculation was ok as long as it took place in the vagina; masturbation, oral sex, all forms of foreplay were ok--just as long as ejaculation took place where God had intended it. David loved Jenny and so went along, but it seemed like Russian roulette. Coming inside her when there was no protection except God's will--what guarantee did David have that God was on his side?

Was this girl Catholic, David wondered? Were all Catholics like Jenny and her mother? David wasn't Catholic. The pre-marital conversations David and Jenny had been required to have with her parish priest, an elderly Lithuanian with a tendency to spoonerisms, had been uncomfortable for David. He was afraid the priest would start asking questions about his religious beliefs, and David had none. Or whether David and Jenny had slept together already, which they had. This girl looked a little like Jenny before they were married. He could imagine her in a Catholic school uniform: short skirt, knee socks. She had a pretty face: pink cheeked, with a single blemish at the corner of her jaw, covered by a thin coat of make-up. A little up-turned nose just like Jenny's, red lips with a pale frost lipstick worn almost completely away. Did she chew her lip, as Jenny did? Did she have traces of pink lipstick on the tips of her front teeth? The reason Jenny had stopped wearing lipstick. The girl's hair, the color of crystallized honey, wasn't as pretty as Jenny's short auburn hair, but it was heavy and long, and she wore it in two long pig-tails. When she sat down she brushed them back, so that they draped over the back of the seat. She sat with her little purse in her lap, her legs crossed at the ankles. She had no packages. Maybe she works at the mall, David thought, maybe at the Friendly's. It seemed likely with all the pink she was wearing; she looked like strawberry ice cream, Jenny's favorite. Strawberry ice cream and an order of fries: Jenny would eat that for breakfast if David let her. If this girl did work at the mall maybe he'd see her more often, maybe talk to her on the ride home some evening.

At the next stop an old man got on the bus. He clutched a translucent brown plastic bag which David recognized as the kind of bag the used-book store on this corner used. The place sold old Playboys and Penthouses; they were piled everywhere, gawked at and fingered by horny high-school boys and sleazy old men. David, to please Jenny after they were married, had taken all his Playboys there and sold them for a few dollars.

The old man slouched down into the seat behind the girl, scratching at his nose with his yellowed fingernails, his wrist sticking out of his sleeve like a soup bone. His gaunt, unshaven face looked like a slab of meat gone moldy, and his green wool coat shone almost as much and was almost as black as his vinyl hunting hat, the flaps of which stuck out at different angles on either side of his head.

As the bus plunged through Main Street's late winter potholes, uneasy that the old man had sat behind the girl,

David watched the old man, whose pale, yellow-blue eyes stared intently as the braids dangled and bounced, as if unsure of what they were. The old man reached forward and lifted one of the dull-golden ropes in his hand, letting it lie across his open red palm. David's stomach tightened. I should warn her, he thought. The old man glanced at David and dropped the braid. The girl had noticed nothing. David clenched his fists in his lap. How dare that old bastard touch this girl. How could he warn the girl? He glared at the old man, his eyes hissing, "I see what you're doing, you old bastard." But the old man didn't look at David again.

Finally, David grew tired of guarding the girl; the old man seemed to have given up molesting her hair. He watched the dingy shops of Johnson City pass his window, but after a while he couldn't resist and glanced over at the girl: the old man was holding one of the braids again, and again the girl sat unaware. David wanted to leap at the old man's throat, to drag him off the bus, to beat him with his own bag of smudge and sticky Playboys. The old man, catching David watching him, released the braid once more. David thought, maybe I could just sit down next to her and tell her that she should move, that the old man was touching her braids. But he was afraid he might startle her. The girl sat lost in herself while the old man hunched behind her, shifting his eyes between her swaying braids and David's seat.

Suddenly the old man grabbed a quick glance at David and then reached toward the girl, his hand stretching not toward the girl's braids, but her head. David almost leaped out of his seat, almost screamed "Look out!" to the girl, but his voice wedged painfully inside him. He forced his mouth open, but his voice remained lodged in his chest, a dull "Uh! Uh!" thudding impotently at the root of his throat. The setting sun flashed hard in David's eyes.

But the old man's hand didn't touch the girl's head, it rose instead above it. For a second David thought the old man was going to rise into the air above the girl like a grotesque angel. Then the old man's claw pressed the yellow signal strip on the wall above the girl. He was getting off. As the bus slowed, he grasped the handle along the top of the back of the girl's seat to pull himself up, and as he did one braid draped across his bony wrist. The girl stiffened and turned, not to the old man, but to David, who turned quickly from her eyes to his own window, the voice still trapped inside him weakly shouting, "He was touching your hair. I wanted to stop him, but I didn't know how. He was touching you! It wasn't me! It wasn't me!"

The girl tucked her braids down between her soiled pink coat and the seat and turned back to her window. The old man shuffled down the aisle to the rear exit, stumbling as the bus jerked to a stop. But David had forgotten the old man and the girl. He was thinking of Jenny, and watching brittle, wrinkled skins of ice form on the puddles in the street. §

HOUSEKEEPING

Dim light and her breath reeking of
Michelob and Marlboro.
Eating dinner I noticed the torn red wallpaper revealing
cracked plaster beneath, like my scabs
displaying scarred skin.

I am inside the posters on my walls
sitting high in a tall oak
listening to the squirrels. They say to stay,
protect them from
the bottle's slave down the hall.

Plates tumble from adult hands
to the floor. I climb further up the tree, but my door
becomes a silhouette of unkempt hair, my room
fills with the smell of stale smoke and beer.

Stolen from my squirrels,
I pick up the pieces.

TIM WILLIAMS

THE PARTY

Eyes falsely convinced.
Red lips speaking pleasantries too nonsensical to
contemplate

Lighting a joint, he inhales deeply
and continues his charade,
flaunting his counterfeit self
upon her naivete.

Through rifts in the bluish veil,
she catches a glimpse of the authentic,
and then another.
His validity fades
and she adjusts her read.

Tips the crystal to her lips,
leaves behind the faint smudge of True Red #9.
Eyes like pendulums,
she sweeps the room.

And moves on.

COLLEEN NOWAK-GROSEK

COMPANY BLUES

I looked at my cluttered little life
crammed into the crumpled Day Planner
I was forever losing.

Never a breakfast without
sipping coffee from too small a cup
while starchy strangers plan their corporate coups across the table.
In an elitist club,
filled with mahogany and crisp coffee table books
whose pages have never been read,
never cried over or loved.

The speaker at the podium,
surely an expert on something.
His words drifting off into the background
like mumbling parishoners saying their rosaries before Mass.

My eyes search the room for the white-gloved waiter
and his magic silver pot
to refill my wake-up potion.
I try to signal him
without showing my desperation,
or using my cheese danish as a Frisbee.

And the women,
they are few,
but each with flawless make-up.
How did they manage such artistry
in the rear view mirror on I-285?

I try to read their name tags.
The little plastic windows blur my view.
Later, they will each gasp in horror
at the small, permanent pin hole in the fine silk of their beautiful suits.
I boycott the name tags.
The little squirrel-like secretaries rush to rescue me
from my perilous absence of signage.
And their poor little eyes,
so dreadfully confused,
when I hold up my hand and mouth the words, No, thank you.

That's when I want to see the other side of the mountain.
Where coffee
can be captured in a heavy stoneware mug before it hits the pot.
Where danish do not exist and
panty hose are banned.
Where exaggeration is not a daily requirement
and looking for your rainbow
has nothing to do with gold.

COLLEEN NOWAK-GROSEK

TRUCKSTOP BONANZA

Hi, my name is Tammi (with an "i")
and I'll be your server today.
Would you like to hear our specials?

Permed, long, yellow blonde hair pulled back
in an old black hair scrunchie
electric blue eyeliner brings out her own steely eyes
three kids at home counting on her for
bedtime stories and an occasional Friday night pizza.

Straight out of small town suburbia
where everyone knows you--or so they think--
homecoming court, 11th grade dropout.

Now she hears "unqualified applicant" or
"why not get your GED?" "do you have any special skills?"
yes ma'am. I can handle a party of twenty 75 year old
men who are on low salt diets, can't quite hear,
gotta have scalding hot coffee in their cups at all times
and can barely chew their \$5.99 t-bones.

She pushes her bangs out of her eyes, sighs--
expertly stacks the buffet plates
and scrapes \$1.62 in change into her apron pocket.

The toothpicks are by the front register.
Y'all come back now, ya hear?

JENNY BADMAN

FLY IN THE STUDY

ED MCGINNIS

Now, listen for the soft click as the door shuts firm, and...there it is! Ho-ho! locking the outside world out. Finally I can relax, this should help- three fingers of scotch.

Lovely sound, pouring scotch. There, the perfect amount. Mmm, no more creeping rivers of metal into and out of the city. No demand for numbers the accountants are hiding. Hell, no more boss. No tie. No shoes. Nothing but that smell of Murphy's Oil Soap in my comfortable crowded study.

Lord, I need some more scotch. This time I'll taste the liquid before I let it slip down my throat. That's better. Now to lose myself in one of these books. How these shelves lean...really should fix this old bookcase I guess. I push and pile so many volumes onto the shelves that...well, Tomorrow. At this moment I want nothing but something good to read: a classic maybe.

I love to run my finger along these rows. Books of all shapes and sizes and colors and textures. Here's the Philosophy of Nietzsche. Bookmarks stick out of half of these, maybe I should finish this...or this: George Orwell? No, no I want to start fresh. Humm, a History of the Great War.

Each has its own story, how I saved its pages from extinction in a world that just doesn't read anymore. The Catcher in the Rye? No, read it twice already. Those idiots out there would let a masterpiece deteriorate right under their noses. I appreciate...ah! Here I go: The Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe. First, a refill...must be a hole in this glass.

Ahh...the most comfortable chair in the world. Let's see...page xi...(ahem) Edgar Allen Poe is the most widely admired, as well as misunderstood, by common reader and sophisticate alike, of all American writers. His character and his career lend to-

What was that, buzzing? Gone now...nothing but the tock of my grandfather clock. A stately antique, that clock. Makes me proud to- there again! I knew it. Sounds like a fly in my study. Well...it can just leave the way it came. Now, his character, and his career, lend to the usual misconceptions that-

That stupid fly. Can't concentrate with that buzzing here and there, fading in and out. I mean it's as bad as the woman in Joe's corner market. "How was your day, Steve?" Airhead. "Got any plans this weekend, Steve?" None of your business, whatever-you-said-your-name-was. I hate it, I don't even know her. I just smile and nod and wish she would ring my groceries up faster. Alright...his character, and, his career...umm, where am I? His character and his career...

Damn that fly! Worse than my family. I'll crush that insect as soon as it comes around again. Flies are no good anyway. Always see them around the wet piles of dogshit my neighbors' mongrel leaves on my sidewalk. I hate my neighbor. Ah-ha! Saw it, just a glimpse, but now it's gone again. Well good, stay gone. O.K. widely admired...blah, blah, blah...character, o.k., his career lends to the usual

miscon- ACK!

My God, my God, my God! There he is! Right on my page! His buzzing wings bloated blue green body the size of this monster! Hairy legs rubbing together feel them creeping on my skin his eyes! Crush him, crush him! Move hands!

Too late. Horrors! Quiet now, hear. He's just a fly. But what a fly, the king of flies I'll wager. He and all his little minions are the scourge of this earth. I'll just sit here pretending to read and when he comes by, heh, I'll squish him.

I believe they start out as white squirming maggots, ugh, it turns my stomach. Flies are always spreading diseases. That's right, everywhere people are sick and dying like Africa, or wherever Sally Struthers goes, infested with the fly. He comes and skitters across our faces when he knows we're too weak to brush him away. Spreading malaria or whatever. Bastard.

Wait! I hear you..there you are! C'mon, a little closer and..Got ya! Damn it. Where are you now? Gotcha! No, missed again. Oh, I see you now. Buzzing across the room. Well you don't know what a good arm I've got. One long distance shot should nail you. Try some heavy reading, Fly! Ooph!

Sure, now I've thrown my book away, you come back. Huh? Hey, get away from me! Look out- ouch! You're lucky that bottle of scotch was empty, Fly. I'm mad now and I'm going to the bookcase to reload. Here I am, Fly! Take that.. and that!

Shoot! I'll fix those holes later. O-ho! I see you again. What's your preference? Shakespeare? Ooph! How about Milton? Umph! Take this! This'll silence you! Ooph! Oh no! You sonnafabitch! Look what you did to my clock! I'll kill you!

Gonna snap those buzzing wings right off. Ha, I'll poke out those big ugly eyes.. take this! Umph! Squash yer guts against that table...stay there.. Ooph! Damn!

Oh-ho! This will get you- the Bible! Yeah, what better way to slay Satan himself? There you are, behind the lampshade. Take... this!! Whoops.

Still hear you. Can hear you breathing. Gone right above now, haven't you, Devil? I know what you think, I've gone right above him and he'll stumble around in the darkness while I cling here safe on the ceiling! Well, here I come, Fly. I'll just sneak up the bookcase and surprise you! Hee-hee, yer so stupid. Feel for each step now, that's it...ha hee hee. Won't you be sur- Whoa! Heh, heh, careful now. Almost there, shh- don't move... Oops! Easy, easy, where's my next step?! Hey- whoa! Hey- whoa! Whoa!!

Ooww, quite jarring. Can't seem to move much. Must be on my back. Help! Hey, somebody get this bookshelf off of me! Help, I'm trapped! Oh no. Not you. Please go away. Fly. Help! No don't. Get off my nose! NOOO!!§

DARK DAYS

Sleek towering buildings
have melted
into tarnished storefronts.
Churches and funeral parlors shine on every corner
amidst burlap and tar-textured row houses.
Artificial green turf lines the steps and porches
of these mustard-colored caskets for the living.

The faces of the inspired
have been replaced
by exhausted, debilitated eyes
of those who stare ahead
in search
of nothing.
Feet plod along the chipped sidewalks
one
ahead
of
the
other.
No destination in mind.

My new life. My new reality.

The women regrettably old, even in their youth.
The old men absurd.
The young men held captive.

The faint whir of the subway
in the distance
no longer sings me to sleep.
I wake to the gongs of clanging bells
from every corner of my new universe.

COLLEEN NOWAK-GROSEK

SCRAPBOOK

This is our house.

Has beautiful ugly yellow flower wallpaper
Floors creak in the night black
Because (I was told) of the mines beneath.

This is me.

Playing in the warm window sun with
Painted lead soldiers
Throw rug winds around my twisting feet
And curly black hair shakes with laughter.

This is mama.

Softly singing something vaguely religious
Fixes dinner on the black coal stove
Always smiling and young.

This is Lucky.

Sleek black dog tugs at the rug at my feet
Bounds again to mama's skirt
Looking for a handout.

This is pop.

Safe today from the mines heavy roof floods methane
Hangs carbide lamp and empty steel pail in cellar
Takes our kisses on anthracite smudged cheeks then
Between tobacco plugs coughs out the coal dust
The first sign of his black lung.

ED MCGINNIS

MENSTRUATION, MY MUSE

Homer had a muse; he
can't even take credit for
the Illiad. Why would he
sweat and agonize over

the perfect word, if only
to attribute it to some
one else, an invisible
immortal creature that did

not even know what being
man meant? Was he desperate
for a history, disappointed
with the account. No wonder

menstruation is such a
hot topic these days. It's full
of the ingredients that
spices a poem, or charges

an essay: blood, pain, violence,
and the unfulfilled longing
that eats at the brain until
the only things that function

are the legs. A current that
flows through the centuries, blood
salted with experience
that sheds tiny portions of

light on my time; it smells like
my mother. Achilles was
killed by a wound to the heel;
(the clit ruined Catherine)

how did Homer know that small
vulnerabilities can
destroy the grandest heroes,
even the heroes with tits?

TRACY YOEELS



WILKES UNIVERSITY
MANUSCRIPT