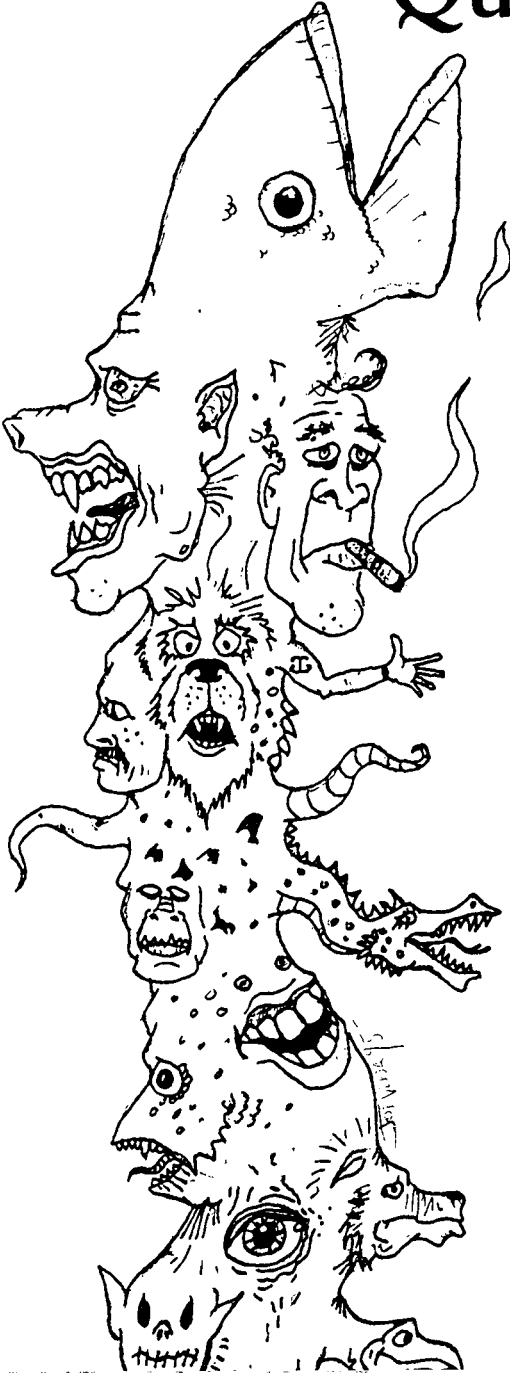


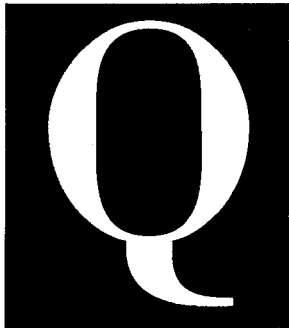
Painted Bride Quarterly



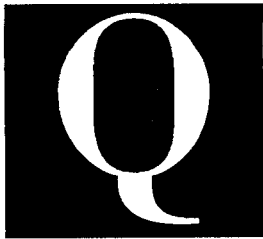
Double Issue 55/56

Painted Bride Quarterly

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Painted Bride Quarterly
Painted Bride Art Center
230 Vine Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106 USA



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Distributed by Bernhard DeBoer, Inc.

Painted Bride Quarterly is distributed free to inmates.
Please forward inquiries to *Painted Bride Quarterly*.

Member of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines

Indexed by the American Humanities Index and the
Index of American Periodical Verse (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press)

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PBQ assumes no responsibility for submissions received without adequate return postage, packaging, or proper identification labels. Submissions should include a short biographical note with phone number and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. All critical articles should be submitted in MLA style.

PBQ requests that upon notification of acceptance, the work(s) be provided on either 3.5" or 5.25" floppy disc (any format), if possible. Discs will be returned with self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Selected manuscripts may be electronically published.

Published four times a year. *Painted Bride Quarterly* is available by subscription: \$16 per year; \$28, two years. Libraries and institutions: \$20 per year. Subscriptions begin with the next quarterly issue. Subscriptions cannot be forwarded; please inform us of address changes. Single issues are \$5.

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Front and Back Cover Art: Joe Vena

Errata

The following acknowledgments for Marjorie Maddox, our 1994 Poetry Chapbook winner, were accidentally omitted from PBQ 53/54. We are grateful for permission to reprint:

“God and the Tightrope,” *Panoply*, 1989; “God Trick-or-Treating,” *Sun Dog*, Winter 1986; “God Goes Fishing,” *Wind*, 1985; “How to Fit God into a Poem,” *Sanskrit*, 1984; “Cross,” *A Widening Light*, 1984.

How to Fit God into a Poem in an earlier version received Cornell University’s 1988 \$500 Robert Chasen Memorial Poetry Award for a poetry sequence.

From the Editors

Beginning with the next issue, *Painted Bride Quarterly* will change its method of payment to contributing authors. In addition to the customary one year subscription, the *Quarterly* will pay \$5.00 per accepted piece to writers appearing in its pages. Five dollars is not much money, we know, and receipt thereof will impress upon some contributors that they make pennies an hour, if that, and would have been a bargain to a Pharaoh or Tsar because writers slave with a will; they supply their own room and board, generally, and drop finished work quietly in a slot for our leisurely review. The Pyramids would have gone up in a month, and Moscow would be the size of New York if our contributors had hands in their construction. We get writers at more than a bargain in this magazine, as do many other publications around the country, and owe them some thanks. The silence is embarrassing.

Everyone on the staff of the *Quarterly* writes, and knows what kind of work writing entails. When the ideas are not flowing it is perhaps the hardest work any of us will ever undertake, aside from adjunct teaching. So perhaps not all of us are waiting for the first insulted letter at "the manoeuvre" or for the first returned check or the first tabulation to reveal that we are getting a short story for "a video rental and a soda." But I am waiting for the philosophical attack pronouncing that the *Quarterly's* new policy commits the intentional fallacy, or perhaps even better, the fallacy of expressive form, and that we should be ashamed for not being on passing terms with the collosolly obvious. We should beware the corruption which will turn our shirts to rainbow-etched lead, someone will conclude, gravely. When we get these letters I will thankfully realize that there are many Protestants in the audience, and will look for one good enough to publish. Maybe I'll write something about it and send it off to another outlet, where it will be hoicked into very uncomfortable positions and scrutinized from embarrassing angles, as is the custom.

Before that, however, let me add that, with the *Quarterly's* ability, the fee for accepted material will increase.

every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come, ye, buy, and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not?

(*Isaiah ch. 55, v.1*)

—Brian Brown

Okay, so maybe nobody will write a letter that says, “I’ve framed your check and mounted it above my desk. It provides me with divine inspiration, and the courage to go on.” And, of course, nobody *can* write a letter that says, “God bless you for sending me a check. Now Momma can have her operation.”

By paying our contributors we are putting ourselves on a razor sharp line. By paying our contributors we are hoping that you will understand our intent, and our dedication. By paying our contributors we are attempting to reach that perfect—maybe illusory—world in which writers could write. By paying our contributors we are hoping to continue to publish this 21-year old magazine.

I am waiting for the first letter that says, “Thanks for the \$5 check. I know what it means.”

My response will be a quote from James (or is it Bartyle?)—“Thanks for your support.”

—Kathleen Volk Miller

Since we’re all at pains to explain ourselves—let me add my voice to the discussion: I’m with them. Despite the ridiculous amount we offer, it’s the sum of our intentions that counts.

—Marion Wrenn

Winter Scene

in memory of Pat Taylor

Snow piles up around the house, thick as pillows.
No people. The forest a ballroom shut down.
Plowed roads diminish into tiny zinc strips.
Cold stars snail away.

From my gutters, icicles drop their sharp braids.
A squirrel quivers useless as an old band-aid.
Asphyxiated rivers produce crazed smiles
that will not go down.

But there! A spot of color. My basset hound.
He inspects the snow like an astronomer
transfixed; registering his findings he knows
no disappointment.

Past One O'clock

Bogs gurgle. Shadows
abandon their neurons

at the sedge's edge.
Stars furrow into their holes.

Deer bleed into the copses.
The Midwest tonight

is a dark sound-stage.
No music here. Only

this minimalist landscape
that never invites us

in. Denuded elms
wave from the roadside—

hundreds of Heathcliffs
beseeching, remembering,

their black saddened backs
heaving over sinks of snow.

Before the Sermon

The day was nooning toward its bells.
All were late, and yet he lingered there
Enjoying summer and gold-nugget bees
Divorced from gravity. He felt, at last,
That he was master of his mind, one of
The few who've made a satisfying picture
Of the world and of the world's world,
The inclusive all, the one containing
All the perfect particles, the one
He was among the ones of, watching as
His hand scooped air as if it were
Ice cream, a clean fresh strawberry,
An air so clean it glittered to his eyes
And melted on his tongue, an air
Of summer on a Sunday. He wouldn't go,
And finally the others left him there.

But for the motion of his atoms, he was still,
For he belonged to it and it to him, one self
With something that was the all of selves and
The all of other than, an all
That reached out to the dancing limits of itself,
If they existed, and informed each dancing particle,
An all of which each cell was a deep part, each
Atom of each cell, each particle of every atom,
And then extend the mind as far as it can think
And there it was again, and went, of course, beyond.

The Death of Irony

I. A Song Concerning the Death of Irony

I looked beyond the obvious.
The steps made of broken wood.

The long, wet patches of sand.
Who knows how many times

I followed water when I was lost.
The other day I watched the sky

And a cypress tree stand still.
None of my critics were there.

I couldn't miss the opportunity.
The steps don't lead up or down,

But the last time I looked,
The sand seemed dry, as if

I invented the whole thing.
Tomorrow, I unearth the flowers.

II. Living Among the Primitive

I'm sorry I haven't written you yet,
But the days seem more like accidents
Than anything we might have agreed to.

I talked to the woman with the scars
Above her eyes and she told me
You moved to Rhode Island to sing.

I never knew you wanted to be famous.
God, that woman is ugly. The scars

Float above her eyes like pelicans.

I don't even know where Rhode Island is.
Last year I was in a lot of trouble.
I saw an angel on the neighbor's roof

And the angel was singing in English.
The words were so real, they weren't
Words at all, but other angels.

Let's agree to one thing. No more
Pretending to know a lot of people.
The woman with the scars above her eyes

Has good teeth and a healthy son.
I said when do we get to hear
Something other than our own names?

III. A Song Concerning the Latest Word

I steal a car and leave the state.
I disappear from the family picnic.

My third quarter earnings rise
And still I refuse to comment.

Snuffy Smith has had it with me.
There I am in the middle of wars.

There I am embezzling from schools.
I always like the foreign films.

I fall out a window and win the game.
There I am killing someone I love.

I auction off the things I own.
I propose a pointless holiday.

I hang around and look suspicious.
I am excited about my three-day sale.

IV. Concerning the Need to Sleep

The man falls asleep as if sleep were a natural part of any conversation. He says to the world you're a dream I have no business dreaming, a place whose boundaries are as thin as I make them when I slip between you and sleep and never know the difference. Still, he is bewildered by the inappropriate shifts in the conversations around him. He is irritated and bored with the stories of adultery that end up being directions to the gymnasium. The cousins who turn out to be front lawns.

The man's wife is a religious woman, and he has every intention of divorcing her. He has made this abundantly clear, as if every time he says it out loud he has created something wonderfully tangible, something that may be held in the hands and shown to other people. His wife doesn't see it that way. She is an attractive woman and has trouble understanding her faith. She sees her faith as a kind of parade that heads in several directions at once.

The man wakes up in the pet store where a sting ray the size of a dinner plate grins at him from beneath its own body. The man is tempted to buy the sting ray, but he realizes the smile is not real, sting rays having no capacity for love. The man watches the fish make circles in its tank, and he wonders what happened to his fondness for mathematics and long walks.

The man's name means nothing to him. His name is like a recipe in a foreign language for a dish he was never very fond of anyway.

His wife tries to imagine what it is like to fall asleep without trying, the daylight not daylight at all but a concoction of the moon and the humidity. She thinks that when you fall asleep without trying, the dogs of the neighborhood have no reason to remain dogs. They do though, choosing not to be rabbits or sparrows or the men who check the electric meters, simply because they like being dogs, the choices of form and behavior based on habit as much as anything else. They could be angels, she thinks, their wings as big around as drainage pipes, their hair turned to down the color of God's eyes. They will always be dogs, and the woman thinks this is why her

husband wants a divorce. He is tired and emotional.

The woman thinks her husband has a disease she saw on television once, a disease she imagines as pastel colors on the surface of the brain where only a kind of cobalt belongs. For some reason she will never fully understand, the woman has been awake for days.

The doctor says the man's brain waves are typical. The doctor says the man is as healthy as Thomas Paine or Chico Marx, men who could stay awake for a very long time.

I think sometimes, the woman tells the doctor, I should divorce him.

She thinks her husband suffers from a type of love without antecedent. The man loves everything and nothing at all, as if he were inventing the things around him from the memories of a childhood spent reading too many books. The kind of books a person can read for days without understanding a word.

The man wakes up on a bus. He thinks the bus is a friend's house where he plays cards every other Sunday. He is polite to the people around him. He puts on his hat and gets off the bus. He walks through a park where the trees all look similar. He dreams he sees a woman. A woman with dark hair he has seen at the pet store many times. She watches the sting ray make circles inside its tank. The man thinks the woman might climb into the water. He thinks he must try to stop her, but he knows things like this have a way of working themselves out. So he kisses the woman. The woman's lips taste like sand. A taste he treasures as if it were uncommon.

Running Ultra Quiet

Underway from Toulon
I sat outboard the turbines on the midwatch,
the whole crew asleep,
and the boat like a man dreaming,
under the black tons.

The engineroom brilliant—
Live steam in the header made a sound
like a shower of snow.
I cradled my head in the lagging
and shivered with heat.

I know what submariners
daydream at sea. Not the lover in the bed,
but the safety of the room.
In ours the blinds banged on the windowsills,
patting the wind down.

Off the French coast that morning,
water on deck in shaft alley tasted salt.
I swung into my rack
and lay awake while the boat climbed
seawater hills,

unable to forget,
and thumbed an Italian fuck mag.
I had nothing else,
and was starting to feel in my curtained bunk
safe as the dead.

The Man Without Passion Arrives at the Grand Canyon

Year by year, the women in my office
turned into hags, the best
French wines tasted domestic,
and my world became the dream
of a god grown bored. So here I am,
staring at the Grand Canyon
as if it were a gutter
running down a street I never lived on.
The car next to mine is full
of children senselessly impressed
by the action of water on rock,
and their father turns up Beethoven
till each note is clear
and easily comprehended. I roll up
my window, look across the canyon,
and listen. I came here
to see something amazing, to feel
a seed I no longer know the name of
pop like a tick inside of me.
I don't. And the sun above the canyon
says only that it's hot,
and the river down there,
among the rocks, says it isn't finished,
that I'll have to keep on waiting,
maybe longer than I can.

The Man Whose Luck Is Changing

After almost a month of sickness,
bad checks, and women
who said no, the spider plant
cuttings have let down their roots
in a jar of water and light.
It has been like that all day:
the TV takes in channels
that used to be tiny storms,
and the crayfish in the tank
has shed its skin
and grown its claw back whole.
Even the laundry brought enough change
for a pint of bourbon
and cigarettes. So here I am, blowing
the best smoke rings of my life
and paying all my bills,
and there is no part of my body
that doesn't feel reborn.
In another hour, when this bourbon
is gone, a woman will knock
on that wooden door. She'll be
gorgeous and paid for and mine
for at least an hour. I'll take her
by storm on the davenport.
I'll call it a lucky life.

The Black Cistern

My name is Rosita Garcia de Reyes and I think it was Carlyle who said that *parchments are venerable, down with thy dust!* and I only remember such a weird thing because I am about to die—no, don't go on so! I mean of course die in the sense that the foolish and vulnerable woman I was is flat-out code blue and I perceive floating, like a vestment-draped wraith exiting the hospice of my pride, a new me bewildered and half-conscious but prepared to make a go of it without clinging love, paternal God, or Jack Daniels & Coke.

Michael was never German in any traditional sense of tribal unity and will always remain in my memory distinctly Westphalian, so proud of his fair skin he cloaked it under long-sleeved shirts and wide brimmed straw hats every summertime. He went to school in London and Munich, prized a shoe box of broken scarabs and other junk he had unearthed near Cairo, claimed to be a Hohenzollern on his mother's side, and should have stayed put in Germany because in America he was nobody.

He was born in Holstein, and of course you laugh, confronted (as I was, slightly drunk on warm pinot noir) with the cognomen of a placid, demulcent-eyed, piebald dairy creature with swollen, pendulous udder. I laughed uproariously because three hours before I became his lover I didn't like him at all but it was New Year's Eve and I being recently bitterly divorced from the stupidest man in Seattle didn't give a damn about making a fool of myself again and again.

Or Michael. He was so pompous. And handsome. *Obscenely* handsome.

I mean obscene, immoral, evil good looks: I don't think a man should out-look a woman. A man's face shouldn't be perfect—his nose shouldn't be small and straight when *yours* is broad and aquiline; his chin should not beautifully jut (gently cleft) when *yours* is shapeless and bearded with fat. I was jealous of him. I wondered if he was gay. I used my wit to attempt to embarrass him but he turned my jokes around and laughed in my (less beautiful) face—my mockery didn't hurt his pride—you *couldn't* hurt Michael's pride. His pride went beyond breeding or schooling or what he liked to term his "sociopolitical egotism;" his pride was a deep black cistern so sweetened with

fantastic syrups of rhetoric you'd *think* it refreshing. Other women found him refreshing. They drank him up. And while we lived in Moscow (Idaho) he lied and told everyone he was a Berliner, because Berlin was the name of a rock band and the location of a deep bunker Adolf Hitler shot himself in and a wall that people died trying to cross: a wall people forever changed a country tearing down. Berlin was romantic. It was hip.

Westphalian males, who are tough, intelligent, sensual, occasionally hysterical, puzzle me. They never admit defeat or error. Another aspect of the male Westphalian's self-esteem is a peculiar belief that he is beset and surrounded by jealous and vicious enemies. I voiced both these observations to Michael one day as we pushed his Z-28 up Garden Way hill to the local Texaco. We had run out of gas three blocks east because Michael insisted *his* car had a "special reserve" below the E.

"I told you so," I teased.

"Crap. Sloppy, illogical Yank crap," he replied (even though I'm not a Yankee), "In Germany you can go another twenty miles on empty."

I said nothing more. What was the point? Just then a carload of thugs roared by and launched a six-pack of empties at us. "Fuck you too!" Michael screamed at them, which sounded like "Fok Yutu," and only made things funnier.

"See, Rosita, now you realize that I was right," he puffed as we rocked the Camaro out of a pot hole and kicked aside broken beer glass, "Germans *are* surrounded by jealous and vicious enemies."

"Herr Michel, mi amigo," I said because it made him crazy when I mixed languages, "Please keep the tank full this time or I will leave you, you damn *Petaïnist*." We rolled the Z-car up to the pump that dispensed Super-Unleaded and leaned over the hood, panting.

"What's a *Petaïnist*?" He never looked at me while he talked. He was cleaning dirt from his manicured hands.

"I was trying to make a good German joke for you, Michael. You know—kind of like sleeping with the enemy—Hitler and France?" The sun felt wonderful, and I wished I could remove my shirt. In Santorin, a white cubana bare-breasted is assumed to be carrying her passport in her shoe. In Idaho, USA she is a filthy nymphomaniac in need of arrest or a thorough gang-bang.

Michael's eyes rolled back under the whites, like a feeding alligator.

"Ah, Rosita, but what would I have to do with Hitler? I've *told* you of my Uncle Anton's service to the Weimar Republic and his unwavering loyalty to field marshal Hindenburg. You *know* my family was intimate with the Rommels during the war, which set them against the socialists..." He smacked his fist into his palm.

I sensed a lengthy dialectic, and I received one.

"...and my Grandfather Eric, already decorated with the Iron Cross for his valor in the first war, fought honorably as a Luftwaffe pilot—he was shot down in 1940 during the so-called Battle for Britain. His war diaries, which are in the archives of Hindenburg library in Munich..."

Goddamn! I cursed myself for setting him off on another tirade.

"...express nothing but scorn for the Nazis and their Führer." He paused to breathe. I reached with a finger and brushed his lips.

"What was that for?"

"You were foaming at the mouth," I said.

"Very funny." The tank was filled, the windows washed, and as Michael retrieved an American Express card from his wallet (thank God I resisted the perverse temptation to ask him if there was such thing as *German* Express) he summed: "Hitler demanded that my grandmother remove my father from Eton, so that he could take his rightful position as Captain of a Youth Brigade, but she refused and with the help of dear friends crossed into England. This was quite brave of her, because at the time, only days after grandfather's death, before the RAF turned the battle around, everyone thought England would soon sue for peace. She would have been shot as a traitor by the occupying Gestapo. Nonetheless, grandma was prepared to immigrate to the United States..."

I clapped my hands over my ears and screamed. The station attendant—more sludge, grease, tattered overall and dirt than visible human body, shook his head at us. I stuck my tongue out at Michael

"You Latins," he said, "are all mentally unbalanced. Too much verve and not enough discipline. Where would we be without Freud or Nietzsche or Einstein?"

"You *don't* want my honest answer."

"Of course I do!" Oh, he was beautiful, my *Deutsche* lover, but at times like these I just wanted to let him go, walk away from his small town, his small mind, his small rural college math department banalities.

We both *taught*. I stress that past tense because Michael is now gone, *really* gone: vamos, preparados, listos, ya! Out of here to the Berlin he always wanted to be from. I still live in the house we shared, but I no longer teach bored freshman the richly expressive Gorostiza, Ibáñez, Fuentes, Marqués. In fact, I don't really *live* in the house Michael and I eventually squared off in on a daily basis because I am afraid of myself there. I believe in ghosts, and the most terrifying haunts are those left by the still-living.

I prefer lounges and theaters where there is the noise of people, even bad people, to assuage aloneness: give me heat, light, high-calorie snack food, casual embraces, weird-but-real situation ethics. The nice thing about being dead and reborn is that I don't have to be a wife or teach or own a house. I rent the split-level kit and caboodle to four lusty undergraduates who are right now (as I write this in the Garden Lounge) undoubtedly fucking in my queen-sized oak canopy waterbed. Or using my blow drier, hot tub, microwave, stereo, television, Sony camcorder (to videotape the fucking, of course. They did that once, erasing my precious copy of *Santa Sangre* to record their venereal contortions and the sad thing was *Santa Sangre* is an exciting movie and the fucking of these young but uninspired students couldn't hold my attention and I turned it off) or cordless GTE phone, but I don't care, I don't. Without Michael, I no longer consider those things personal possessions we used and treasured but *things* of plastic, glass, metal. Life is not meant to be spent alone, amassing high-tech junk. Life is to share. And love. My name is Rosita Garcia de Reyes and I think it was Carlyle who said that *parchments are venerable, down with thy dust!* and I only remember such a weird thing because I am about to die.

What happened was this: Michael woke up one day and decided he was wasting his life. He is not brilliant (his dissertation discussed prime interest rate fluctuation indices) but he is certainly spontaneous, the kind of man who will hold you against the undertow, planting kisses and hot touches like some movie-pilot. The kind of man who will move you from Boston to Moscow to escape the rat race (even if you *like* rats) in order to live "like men and women should in God's open country breathing the same wild, pure air Hemingway breathed." Can you believe I fell for that? Lord, I fell hard but if you land on ice and sit there long enough it melts. I've grown fond of this desolation, and when I think of Michael in Berlin I scream until the icy mountain

lakes of Idaho transform my naked breath into part of the midnight's *real* woman substance.

All work is noble. All nobility is senseless. I am the Queen Of Rigorous Veracities with a troop of Apes holding Black Cisterns. Why of course I'd dip into them over and over, awaiting quick metamorphoses. Awaiting that senseless state of being where nothing ever hurts.

I'm still waiting. But *back* to that Sunday morning Michael decided he was wasting his life: I had just finished squeezing six Safeway oranges and picking seeds and pulp out of the juice. The eggs were burned. I can't cook with cast iron skillets and margarine— everything turns out Cajun.

"I'm wasting my life!" he moaned, "Every minute, every precious day of it!"

I didn't take him serious. I yawned, tasted the bitterness of night in my mouth, drank two glasses of cloudy water, chewed aspirin and asked him what was wrong. We had drunk an incredible amount of Médoc the night before. We had kept drinking into early morning, when the tomcat slams against the screen and the green parrot squawks out in nightmare because he is exhausted but we've become too drunk to cover him and the drafts make him think of winter. My head tortured me. I figured his head must hurt too. Michael is not a strong drinker—he becomes a silly drunk, a loud boyish bore—and he is morbidly sensitive when hungover.

"My *life!* It is slipping away from me. I need stimulation. I need to do something, something real or noble or historic. I need to get out of here and do something *great.*"

"Go climb the Matterhorn, then," I said. My voice was perhaps bitter. It was simply too early on a Sunday morning for me to take his whining shit, his cunning depressions. He sat hunched on the bed scratching the dark stubble on his beautiful jaws and I couldn't resist continuing. "or climb Everest—no, too dangerous! How about Mt. Rainier? Rainier is closer, so if you change your mind you can return without great expense."

Michael stared at me, dumbstruck. "I'm serious!"

"So am I. Quit sitting around complaining, expecting others to fulfill your life."

"I'm goddamned *serious!*" he screamed, and hit me. I don't mean he struck me with his fists, but he picked up the heavy plastic cradle

to the cordless phone and hit me in the lower back with it. He pitched for his department's softball team—the Angry Savants—and he could really throw. My legs went numb and I fell. He came to me but I screamed “Get the hell away from here!” I was so angry with Michael I could have killed him, I could have crawled to the nightstand and drawn out a pistol and shot him dead, which is why I don't keep a gun. I know my Cuban temper well. I wanted to strike back, throw the telephone cradle back at him and crush that ugly handsome face but the pain was so great I sat on the floor and rubbed my back and cried.

“Oh, I'm sorry, Rosita God, I'm sorry,” he said. I knew then that he was truly sorry, shocked and ashamed with himself, because he lit a cigarette and stared out the window saying nothing more. It would have taken Apocalypse to shut Michael's great big mouth—a loud devastating cataclysm to strike him taciturn—and in a way there was one: the sudden irrevocable, irremediable, end of us. Love can die that quickly, that foolishly. Our world, that wonderful binary opposition of Me/Him, was over. Go tell it on the mountain.

“Get out,” I said, not wanting him to leave. I wanted him to plead, to touch me.

He left. That's how rapidly bad things come and go, flood and ebb—like a dam's burst there is a rampage and then a water shortage. And when the opaque floodwaters of violent *love* recede you are stranded with blue skies overhead, rainbows at your face but your feet ache and looking down you see knee-deep filth and typhoid. It isn't hate which poisons the soul from the ground up but the toxins of over-requited love. There are men who have physically hurt me more—left me debts, bruises, gonorrhea—who I hate less than Michael. There is no insurance against remorse, that bad-water sickness of reminiscence and desire. I cannot teach, or live in a house, or apply makeup. I loved him that much.

There is more, which is why I am sitting at this sticky formica bar-top ignoring the lechery of unemployed concrete fabricators and the advances of the mixologist. I am drinking sense into my head, making sense of my gift. Michael sent me Air Mail a piece of the Berlin Wall. I tore open the heavy package and there it was, no letter or explanation, none necessary: the wall! Michael got his wish; he did *something*. You've seen him if you read Newsweek, People, Time, Life, Washington Post, Paris Match: blond hair ablaze like

a flag in the spotlight, standing atop a shattered buttress swinging his sledge hammer—my Michael the big talker, destroying fascism the only way it ever can be—by angry ordinary people.

I held the rock in my hand, and that's what it seemed then to me in the smelly, crepuscular gloom of tavern—*rock*. Not cement, man-made matrix of lime, sand and pebble but rare indigenous slab—the strata of a Universal Maker far older than any god; a bedrock of hate greed, and ignorance The name on the label said Rosita Garcia de Reyes and that is *me* but I can think of no grander name to utter than SAMSON, SAMSON! because I have been reading Judges 14-16. Then the dilatations passed. The rock didn't glow—necromantically in my hands like the ash of Proteus or the slender digit of Hermes; this was no relic but dirty concrete, and I no Karyai priestess but a stoned woman in a bar full of horny failures.

The faint epiphany left was the stinging realization that I was a fool. A goddamned hard headed proud fool. I sent my beautiful, brave Michael away in order to live this barhopping misanthropic antipathy? In this life you can slip and risk anything.

A scarlet "F" had been spray-painted on the shard. The bright mark still exuded that vernal, alcohol odor of fresh paint. I think the graffiti was applied immediately preceding destruction of the wall, perhaps by Michael himself. I tried desperately to let him go, then, to lunge to the door and throw his damned rock into a hedge or windshield or handsome face. I dropped the wall-piece and kicked the wall-piece, tearing scales from my shark boots. I fell to my hands and knees and kissed the wall-piece. I brought to my mouth the flavor of sweat, hydrocarbons, death and revolution. "This chunk of nothing isn't the Turin Shroud!" I shouted, "this isn't the outline of salvation."

I don't need a coterie of scientists to tell me what bloody protest is embedded in this rock, what molecules of Michael radiate outward from within:

Germany Forever? No, far too fatuous for a Westphalian.

Fuck Fascism? Doggerel. Not my Michael.

Friendship? Forgiveness? Maybe. I stopped crying. I took ballpoint pen and cocktail napkin and exhausted every F I know in three languages. Then I shouted "F!" "FFF!" until the bartender begged me to go home with him. Then, three glasses of his scotch later I think (and still do) Michael leaned in my fist when I hit to impart what so few of us—media-convinced and horizontally led like nose-

ringed beasts—ever achieve: a working concept of true *freedom*.
“Freedom!” I screamed, kicking car keys and Johnny Walker bottle
out of the bartender’s hands, “Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!”

In war, casualties are a certainty.

The Ruffled Edge

Smoked salmon leather, this thong of a man, who ambles by water in a directed south saunter over gravelly sand—now wet purple where it rims the sea. He carries an oblong sack his own skin's color. His plastic shoes, clear with numerous holes (sloosh in sloosh out) make a squelching sound. She lifts her head, ball-bearing pivot, to widen her peripheral range; he knows she's there and he figures she sees him; cap bobbing blue like dark water. She lies beneath dunes amidst shells—curled in glass eye colors. Sand rises in wind, creamy and sorrel. Ka-plunge plunge—dog feet in shallows sends a crawl up the salt-pulled skin on her spine.

Sun prisms hot shards, and black dots squabble, moaning and mewing in thin air. She follows him, eyes tracing his lines—the path of his all-one-color skin, as he wanders. Wound tight rubber-bands and a rounded nub hangs in front, while his legs just continue. Up in back too, merely darker. Ribs she can see and his bones through his skin, weathered parchment, shell of a valuable book, striated pink marble like smoked rump of a pig been skinned. How common this hairlessness, she thinks, thinking: how I should write that here, held in a purple cup, headside toward bluffs, feet pointing down across the Atlantic toward America?—(she stretches her body in length toward some green

grey seaport on the eastern coast, maybe Boston, maybe even the wharf with that big hotel. She spent the night with a man buying drinks with so many pieces of money it began way past dark, to resemble useless, dirty handled roughage of paper, lettuce promises which wilted, as the evening wore on, while he all the time, heated up; his coins clacked angrily like bits of glinty glass in the sea of melted ice and foam at the bar, chips worn deceptively smooth from his shifty use, but oh-so-dangerously brittle, algid, sharply insincere and...)

—that: It's good. Something at least. Small rise of sand, size of one hand, by her navel. And lower.

She watches him pass, tipping the frame of her ribcage forward, and he, still passing below her, halts; they're somehow together. What would the others say if they came down to the beach where she rocks—her excitement too much to contain—and she could feel herself swell, like the dark blue water, swell in their sight, save for the bloodblack interior, the elastic smooth eel-kush-hibiscus bruising interior of her favorite flower—which is always in bloom, or can be on command, and is, therefore, often the favorite. And then she lies back mat of dark hair, curled like fur of the dog in the surf, some man in a city where pressed shirts are required, where sand is a tiring nuisance, and dunes can't possibly hide what goes on, and furthermore, stretching to stand she unfolds toward the clear flat open expanse of sky, walks gingerly also, yet with confidence toward the incoming onrushing waves. It seems to take her forever, she thinks. How long have I been walking directly toward this—impossible distance. Just when she has decided to stop, ah, she's arrived at the ruffled edge. She tears the card with its

glossy view and its spindly message into tiny triangular pieces and Whoosh, she lets go. They scatter... wafting away, small sails capping the waves, some ripple over the horizon where America probably still hunkers, some drift up toward Concarneau and Penzance, then on to St. Georges Channel and Newcastle, then even past Ireland all together, and the Hebrides and off toward Iceland and maybe even further past that... and there are others which swirl down toward San Sebastian, riding the currents which stir the Bay of Biscay, making their way out and around Spain's shoulder, buoyed off toward Portugal, Tangier, into the Mediterranean Sea toward Italy, then Cyprus, following currents through the Dardanelles, past Istanbul, eddying into the Black Sea, and then....

Elation

From the green summit
where powder-gold maples shiver
in air so thin
it burns, where the mountain's
face is my face, where the horizon
line smokes; from this high
vantage it is one
leaf's breadth
over the edge of certainty
and I fall so fast
my cry trails behind
like a red scarf
on snow; the mountain
forswears me, I have no face,
and a world plunged
in darkness could love
me much better.

Bagatelle

This is me:
I buy a copy
of *The Brothers Karamazov*
in the original Russian,
I'm sitting at a park bench
reading it aloud,
I have to accent syllables
intuitively.
Soon enough,
a dark-haired woman
with glowing eyes
and a black ribbon about her neck
comes up, sits very close,
and asks me, deeply,
what I'm reading.
I know enough Russian to say
Ya ne govoryu po-angliski,
"I don't speak English,"
but I tell her I speak no English
in English.
This is lesson one.

The Break

The first time I break my ankle, I am eight months pregnant and nowhere near ready to let go, fierce with fear as I am of this child already so much more important than I am or anyone else

for that matter,

this greatest of all possible judges: greater even than the Church.

But what if I can't love him?

What if I don't even like him?

He'll be there with me for the rest of my life.

In the middle of my life, a child takes over where Christ left off, reminding me that I am less and his rights count more than mine.

His will be done. I have no power here.

He will be born. He will split my body in two when he decides and I'll be thrown at will into yet another life where his life occupies my center. Still I cannot direct it more than a few minutes, then I'll have to step aside and let him go again when he decides as if he weren't just as vital as any other organ in my body or limb.

Eleven years later to the day, I leave his lesson hating him there ahead of me

for not caring enough about the music, not wanting for himself what

I want,

talking instead about Burger King and I love you, Mommy, kissing up to me

to quiet me, caring only that I not be angry, changing the subject as if it were possible that any other life but his music and my disappointment could exist now between us. But

I have to shut my mouth. I have no power here.

I cannot tear into him.

I cannot make him love the music as much as I do.

So soon he's flown out from the center of me.

Let him go. Let him go, a mother's mantra instructs me as I start down the stairs, him almost at the door, talking on about Whoppers and Chicken Tenders and Our Special Day and I'm doing it,

saying nothing, not interrupting for the thrill of even the smallest chastisement, but I miss the last step, my ankle

turns in on itself, my whole body smashes down on top of it,
dagers of
light split my body in two. "Fuck!" I scream into the lobby
of this Jewish Community Center where children walk with
violins and backpacks and *David!* when someone offers water,
David! It's black again, then the police then David yelping,
"Mom, I'm here!"

Mess

Nobody lets you complain. *You must be patient. Think Positively. Attitude determines cure.* Interpretation: say, "Fine. Coming along just fine." Smile. Lie when people ask about your smashed foot. Collect all the unsightly rage and self-pity, electrical shocks and insidious burning and stuff them down your throat the way we women used to stuff unsightly hips and butts into rubberized girdles that kept us from moving. Once inside the narrowed tunnel of your throat, pain, rage, and self-pity will merge into one subcutaneous construction. Hold it tightly until it swells enough for you to feel it whistling as you breathe; though when it thickens so much it threatens to choke you, shove it further down. Keep it lodged in your belly like an alien fetus that devours you from the inside out. Everyone knows if you can't see it, it's not there. Every six or eight weeks though, just for the hell of it, boil over and vomit it all over your family, *You can take my fuckin' ankle with all its fuckin' whining and stuff it up your fuckin' ass!* Then cut the ears off well meaning friends and patronizing doctors. Spit at the next one who laughs. You can tear your clothes off now or stand on the street corner flailing your crutches or collapse in a puddle of piss and tears on the floor. No one will try to stop you. Unkempt as you are with all your shitty virtue, nobody appreciates a mess.

He Is Tired of Self-Portraits of Artists, Pouting

One simple sonnet,
about the white gloves
of a true lover, unpublished
in a nun's notebook,
turns his crank immensely.

Sestina About Reciprocity

Two dimes and a nickel don't always equal a quarter.

We pay each other in foreign currencies. At the end
of another day, feet propped on a brocade ottoman,
we await your arrival. Your style
is to be late. We've decided you have your own sense of time
which we've learned is not ours. The smudged red
ball of sun begins to sink into elbows, knees, outflung arms
of pines. Nature knows a comfort
only one in love with herself can know. Confident
to touch everything at once with no criminal
intent, to caress each one of us with abandon, to leave
us without word each day in silken

darkness smattered by cold stars which wink
like eyes of slick, mean boys wearing raw silk
jackets, boys you know you shouldn't go with, but follow
anyway, knowing full well that in the end
they'll have you in a Saab or some other compromising bed
of a red pickup, undressed. Which is the crime?
After all, each one of us asks to go along. You never
told us honesty and virtue exist in the stylish
package you present to the world. Your personality
is three-quarters facade. We take comfort
in telling you such things, though we wonder whether
they ever reach your heart. Each morning, red

eyes give you away for having been awake all
night, or weeping. *I was reading,*
you tell us over breakfast, though we question whose
open book, whose hands and tea leaves, whose silk
sheets you spent the evening sweeping your eyes and
limbs across. You've worked out some comfortable
arrangement. Are you happy? We wait in our chairs
until quarter to twelve and in the end
we take ourselves to bed. We are miffed but secretly
we feel relief. We rationalize. Yours is a stylized
beauty which isn't true enough; you are no good for us.
Already, we have lovers, wives. Our eyes incriminate

Painted Bride Quarterly
is pleased to announce the winners
of its Second Annual Poetry Contest:

First Place: Katrina Roberts
"Sestina About Reciprocity"

Second Place: Charles Rafferty
"Romance"

Third Place: Susan Cavanaugh
"Migration"
"What the Gypsy Won't Tell You"

Judged by Stephen Dunn

1st, 2nd, and 3rd place poems
appear on the following pages.

us, though. Indeed, we do desire you. To rationalize
 is to commit the most unforgivable crime;
 hence, our decision to live on the edge, to ride each guardrail
 through stormy nights, to let two tires of our red
 Corvette kiss the air as we bomb through backwoods, careen
 around hairpin turns, our headbeams two stilettos
 piercing the dark fog fabric. Hundreds of feet off the ground
 we must be willing to trust the ability of silkworms
 to make threads strong enough to hold us when we leap
 from planes. Our reservations are endless.
 It helps to be pushed, and when you want, you push us.
 We ply you with shots of Southern Comfort,

we give you clove cigarettes to smoke and sweet morsels
 to nibble. We tuck our down-filled comforters
 around your small shoulders, fearing that you might fly away
 from us at any moment. We feel driven toward *crime*
passionnel, but could we actually kill you to keep you here?
 Two nickels for a dime, five pennies a nickel, an endless
 number of ways to make change occur. In our transactions
 with you, each seductive gesture seems a potential red
 herring hiding a more lucrative arrangement. For whom? Life's
 pleasures are temporary and not entirely for us. The silken
 flattery you offer eases our fears momentarily, though
 often we debate virtues of substance versus style

in an attempt to convince ourselves that both are good. Many
 of us choose the single flamboyant stylist
 if given a quarter of a chance. We give and take from her,
 relishing in private some degree of comfort
 because she has others. Fortunately she doesn't want to give
 herself completely to us: we love her cornsilk
 hair and skin, we love flirtation with its pretty possibilities,
 but to us, actual involvement is a petty crime
 considering our responsibilities at home. Reciprocity is beautiful
 in the way it differs from equivalence. Red
 means *stop* in a car on the line in Dubuque, but in Amsterdam
 red invites us to *come in, world without end*,

amen... Finally, reciprocity should have nothing to do
with addition. We decide we can burn one end
of the beeswax candle, and still share its heat and flame.

We will wait but irreverently; we will live stylishly
but with simplicity. If you come to us, we'll take from you
your kind wishes and embraces, we'll kiss your red
lips. Certainly at times we must risk our lives to feel truly
alive, but we mustn't always trade simple comforts
we have found already, for thrill. Reciprocity resembles honesty
in that not giving is often giving more. The criminal
takes more than she deserves without giving back. The banker
gives but takes note. The one we await, who is silk-

clad and late as usual, finally straddles us all like a turnstile,
moves through tolls from city to country, sets crime
into the comfortable motion of a cantering palomino. We mean it
when we say, *we were never more ready*.

A field falls at our feet, a silk handkerchief. We think it lies
still, but in wind like this, the wheat undulates endlessly.

Romance

Only the still life by Cezanne
does not suffer the clinking of glasses,
the bruising of fruit

by clumsy hands. The girl is lying
on the bed, half-undressed
in her parents' room,

while the boy whose breath is bad
and whose lips she's wanted
to kiss all week is working

at her zipper.
She is trying not to notice
the busted champagne flute

that he has knocked
to the hardwood floor.
She wants to enjoy this moment

like the high-heeled women
in the movies she has seen,
and he wants her

to feel like this, though he hasn't thought
to ask, or even to wonder,
if there might be a way

to make her tremble more.
The boy is just as ignorant
as he hopes he does not seem.

There, on her parents' bed,
by the antique highboy
and the prints of paintings

that neither of them could name,
she is doing her best to act
as though she were ignoring

the creep of headlights
across the wall. She is doing her best
to keep from thinking

of the key inside the lock
and the footsteps of her parents
tapping up the stairs.

She has waited all her life
for this. And there, half-drunk
on a rumpled bed, she almost wonders

if this is what anyone
would ever call romance.
But the hitches and snaps are all

undone. Nothing can save her now.

Migration

Light's taking itself away from the sky.
What osprey know is when to leave,

their migration part of the rhyme I've learned
to count on while I count what's left

in my yes, it's fall again garden.
How is it I've become

what you've learned to count on.
Is it that I'm still in this kitchen, my same

chopping block, my same pretty smells.
Do you see I hold the onions with much more

care beneath my carving knife. Soon
I'll be turning on the lamps at five.

It's been a long summer. The closer I get
to forty, the easier this is. It's true

it's faster. The first taste of fall is spring
upon my tongue. Did you go away, have you

taken any pictures? There must be
something new you can tell about the sun.

Tell it to me while I make room
in the fridge for this big bowl

of tomatoes I will can so I may
taste the sun in December.

I didn't go away this year. You may find
it hard to believe I stayed right here.

I cannot quite believe your sunset
though I am sure that is you in the photo.

The osprey are gone, the first to come
and the first to go, isn't that what you said

last year. Could you hand me
those few sweet peppers. Of course I mean

the taste of fall is spring upon my tongue,
it's part of what I can mean now.

Isn't it pretty to think of the seasons
so fast their taste is one? Will you be

staying for dinner? There is plenty to eat
and later I will read you a story.

It will be about the way daylight dies,
the stars as compass, the good sense of a bird.

What the Gypsy Won't Tell You

There will be one man you won't be ready for. He will give you his boyiness freely and wide, his flesh spilling out of a ripped t-shirt on a given May morning. He will be any kind of man—a butcher, a surgeon, a thief. You'll be afraid of the way his hello on you means it, you will taste his long kiss long after you've kissed all things from the old ailing cat to the fat bug that lands on your lips on a Sunday while you're digging in the garden. He will teach you one or two things. You will leave him.

He will ribbon his way through all the events of your hair. In twenty years you'll think of him while you boil a pot of rice or drive to work down a brilliantly sunny road; when your son has his first day of school and you watch him walk past those trees at the end of your street; when they have to cut something out to keep you alive and you're glad to oblige, to get just one more sweet day. There will be men in the laundromat looking and smiling like him, so many men you'll begin to start thinking you made him up. You don't have to get over this,

it can become the wonderful part of your heart. You can carry it with you always and you won't discuss it but will always wish you had fixed it. You'll see flashes

of sun on the arms of some man
in some town by some glistening bay
after you've dreamed of hunting
him down in some mountain hotel
long after fall fills the streets
with his scent which you'll wear
like that scar on your lip,
the one you sink your teeth in
late at night when you're pretty
sure no one can see you. You
will not spot this in advance.

Few things will bring more joy
than those days you feel his voice clearly
whistling in the dust on your piano.
You will wonder if he went to college,
if he had any babies, if the shrapnel
from Da Nang still hurts his right calf.
You would like to meet his mother
(you never met his mother.)
You would like to ask him to dinner,
you would like to know where he banks
but his number's not in the book, it's never
in the book and the number you have's
been long disconnected. You will want
to do these things often, you do not have to
change it the way you change every wish
you make over every birthday cake
just before you blow the candles out.

Buk—Screaming Through the Sixties

Where were you in the Sixties? Charles Bukowski was screaming from his balcony. Below him cities were burning; the madness in the streets was matched only by the horrors in Southeast Asia; Washington was three goofy looking monkeys seeing, hearing, and speaking no sense; and meanwhile, mobs—no, make that multitudes—were marching through town “for” this and “against” that, all the way to Woodstock. The whole time, Buk was sitting at his desk, a clutter of dead soldiers and old Racing Forms, pounding on his typer—screaming.

Collecting the letters of ten years is a formidable task, and not necessarily one all that worthwhile. After all, this is the age of telephones, of cheap, fast transportation. Long before the 1960s people got out of the habit of letters. Even writers, those you might think would know the value and sense of getting ideas onto the page, seldom develop heady and interesting correspondences. For many, letters are quick notes about business, cutting to the bone, the who, the when, and ignoring completely the why.

Lucky for us, Seamus Cooney has searched far and wide for the letters of Bukowski. Buk took the task seriously, sending mail off in every direction. And so, Cooney takes his task just as seriously. Though his may not have been all that difficult. Buk’s letters, you see, have long had a life of their own, being published in a number of magazines, often in their original form, holographic and typographic wonders, complete with marginalia, designs, and illustrations—most notably, the little guy and his jug (and sometimes his dog, and his tree, and) This, we can assume, is only the first volume—1960 to 1970; as such, it might turn out to be the most difficult to have assembled, as well as the most honest, open, and interesting.

Charles Bukowski. *Screams from the Balcony—Selected Letters 1960–1970*. Black Sparrow Press, 1993; 361+ pp. \$25.(cloth); \$15 (pbk.)

For those of us who remember the Sixties, there are some surprises. Buk was apparently oblivious to most of it—and clearly by choice. JFK’s assassination is mentioned, but only in passing, and only to

deny sympathy; the Free Speech to-do at Berkeley gets a couple lines denouncing Anarchy (to William Wantling); and the burning of the cities in '65 gives rise to a few scattered sentences and an admission of fear. Vietnam and Johnson are occasionally mentioned, but hardly addressed. Buk's take on the Sixties was not exactly a view from the bunker, but more a (not so?) safe house on the edge of the world, halfway between madness and melancholy.

"...they will see this figure in his shorts, cock peeking out, pounding in beerswill rhythm on the hall boards making for the kitchen, saying nothing, ignoring all, not worried about Selma, not worried about Viet Nam, just trying to shake people and ideas from the ratskull and suck down another beer"

(to Blazak, p. 142)

Clearly, there were other things that had to be dealt with.

For Buk it was, indeed, war all the time: the bomb, the streets, the factory—threats at every turn. You didn't have to be crawling on your belly in Khe Sanh to know the meanings of *friendly fire*, *anti-personnel* and *collateral damage*. Buk served his time in the U.S. Postal Service. He landed the good-pay, steady-work in the early Sixties, and the climax of the story told in these missives comes with his literary success—the point he reached by 1969 when he could walk away from the time clock, the rank-and-file goosestepping that was so contrary to his nature and disruptive to his state of mind.

In '67 Buk parlayed his burgeoning popularity into near cult status by contributing a weekly column to *Open City*, a San Francisco "underground" paper which offered him space to say whatever he wanted, on whatever subjects he chose. (These pieces were collected later for the sometimes brilliant and always outrageous *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*.) When the bosses down at the plant found out that their Hank Bukowski was the guy writing those wild ruminations in the paper, there was much concern. (Actually, someone sent the supervisors copies of the columns and ranting letters!) So, there were interviews, and stupid questions, and lots of general confusion—until finally, after warnings and implied threats, the whole matter was dropped, ignored. Buk, however, was fully aware of how comfortable things had been with the regular income, and wondered how and when

he would be able to sever relations himself and make do on the fruits of his literary labors. Things were happening: John Martin was guaranteeing hefty checks up front for new books; his *Open City* pieces aroused a lot of interest. "jesus christ, for a lousy post office clerk, things are sure happening." Soon, clearly, the time would come when his freedom could be bought. When it would be just him and his typer; the beer, horses, women, and other worldly distractions invited in only on his own terms, only when he chose to have them.

Buk was a great correspondent—one gets the impression that he answered every piece of mail. A special few, however—eight or ten—were treated to more than simply letters. With people for whom he felt a common bond, he bared his soul. Long, rambling, drunken and ornery letters that pulled no punches.

Among those who brought out the best in him were Jon and Louise Webb, the editors of *The Outsiders* and proprietors of Loujon Press. It is tempting to say that they got the ball rolling for Bukowski, championing his work in the magazine and then publishing some of his earliest and most acclaimed collections. With Buk, though, there can be no argument; the explosion was inevitable. There is no reason, however, to play down the role the Webbs had in his meteoric rise. Ann Bauman (Menebroker) touched a nerve in Buk. He flirts, crows, and opens up to her in ways that I think would surprise many of the others.

"...If you should ever come down here your problem will be to keep the conversation "dull." I am an old wolf and after a few beers begin to imagine myself a young bull. I would always rather chance that they go away angry and unloved than unangry and unloved. It is better, of course, for them to leave unangry and loved, but of the other choices, at least I will know that I have tried...."

(p.64)

Al Purdy, the Canadian poet, is represented here only sparingly; a volume of the letters exchanged between these two has already been published (*The Bukowski/Purdy Letters*). Neeli Cherry (Cherkovski) is a young poet who co-edited with Buk his only magazine venture; *Laugh Literary and Man the Humping Guns* lasted for only a few issues in 1969-70. Cherkovski would go on to write *Hank*, a biography that

appeared in 1991.

In William Wantling (and his wife, Ruth), Carl Weissner, and especially Douglas Blazak, Buk found true kindred spirits. Weissner was his German connection, his translator, agent, publisher, and promoter, in the land of his birth. (And this meant a great deal to Bukowski.) Blazak was a young poet in Illinois who had read the poems and like so many others had the urge to write a letter. He and Buk hit it off right away. Blazak was a prole who knew exactly what Buk was saying about the factory, the streets, and the writing of poetry. It is to Douglas Blazak that Buk comes most alive, reveals most about himself. The vulnerability, anger, angst, and braggadocio all comes together in the long wonderful letters Buk posted for Illinois, then later, when Blazak relocated, to Northern California.

The matter of all these letters is life: plain and simple, it is family, work, and writing. They are oft-times funny, and amazingly sad. Buk is obsessed with dying, and he isn't above an occasional bout with self-pity. "get going, Buk, the grave diggers are licking their palms in the sunset!" He is wonderfully philosophic at times, though he'd hate to hear that. Common sense in common speech is a rare commodity, and hardly what we think to label philosophy, but his many comments on writing, poetry, and the business of literature, are as informed and informative as any Aesthetician's you might name.

Buk died in March. While I've spoken to a handful of friends, some friends of his, some fans, I'm feeling pretty much out-of-the-loop these days. Still, I know, in every corner of the fiefdom people are scribbling line after line about him. I am glad that I'm not editing a magazine just now. The very thought of the flood of elegies—poets attesting to his genius, his flaws; his incredible benevolence and/or surly indifference. Are you prepared for the ghost sightings at 7-Elevens in Kalamazoo, the U.F.O. connections, and special issues of litmags (which will have more to do with the bucks to be made from the corpse than the honor and praise they ramble on about)?

One way to remember Buk would be to read through his old letters.

Louis McKee

A Poem for Activist Insomniacs

*What the world could be
is my good dream
and my agony....*

—Wendell Berry

When I can't sleep, I imagine
hands tearing down the Pentagon,
broad-palmed, calloused hands,
slender hands with earth-crescents
under nails, ink-stained hands,
the quick, eager hands of children.
I imagine us turning the Pentagon
over to the sun. I imagine
the pale generals crawling out
one by one.

The earth heaves a great sigh,
stretches and twists herself:
stones crumble. Squash and cucumbers
burst through cracks in the sidewalk,
twining tendrils through rubble heaps.
Five-year-olds leapfrog over glowing
pumpkins, mouths stuffed speechless
with new peas. Among the vines,
our naked babies creep: babies dark
as blackberries, brown as almonds
or cinnamon, pink and golden as
peaches. Strawberry plants spring
up beneath their knees. Babies sit
on their rumps and feast, juice
pouring down their chins.

Aimlessly the generals roam
until one by one they strip themselves
of uniforms, pallid bellies flopping
free. Beneath their feet sprout
clover, partridgeberry, maiden pink.

They lie back, remembering how to
breathe, and wriggle toes, while
toddlers twine violets into their
graying hair. Our babies crawl
to them and, sticky fingers gripping
knees, balance spraddle-legged,
dappling the old men's skins
with scarlet hands.

Two-part Invention No. 4

Andante

Traces of sunlight lumber in craters, captive episode,
There are no traces of sunlight, wiped clear by

mf.

lunacy of flowers, snake-technologies, someone made
the lunatic technologies; no flowers remain.

the decision to bomb, someone called in the coordinates,
The craters haul cheers from the air. The coordinates

& once set, the numbers do not shift.
speak a different language, the snake-word, the snake-day.

The sunlight is the decision. The raid
The photographers witness the decision; the raid

reminds us that our language produces snakes of sunlight.
is the lamb. The lamb is the sunlight-snake.

The decision brought the death of snakes for
Shadows of primitive terror in a sky of snakes

us to decide upon, to approve the numbers the technology
& sunlight within sunlight & sunlight &

of sunlight, breath of the spectrum, crop of rain.
sunlight. Breathe the rain over a ruined crop.

Our technology can be trusted to place sunlight into
The decision can be trusted to place the numbers

the earth, to place our numbers into the rain &
into the earth. One place becomes a number, another

wait for the snake crop, for the snake to swallow the
a clot of rain for the sake of the crop.

child, to lumber itself over the trampled gates of the
The child lumbers its weight over the labyrinth.

labyrinth, to bring the same darkness with the skill of a
The darkness is the same darkness everywhere

number. We bring the technology to wreck
except in the number. Bring the rain; bring the wreckage.

the crop, to cry Jubilate Agno into the sunlight behind
Transfix the cry of the American needle into the rain-

the snake's labyrinth. Our myth is the sunlight
soiled crop of Indo-china, the labyrinth in which we

inside the technology, the crop in the lamb, the snake
were trapped w/technology, crop-myth, lamb-hate, &

in the craters & cameras that hold the labyrinth
our skulls, craters & cameras held the labyrinth like a

to the skull for moments that become the snake's world.
child for the few moments when the mind becomes the lamb.

The Year Nobody Died

It was nearly March before anyone noticed,
and the first
was Merlene Svensgard, whose husband Al

had died the last day of December
in the middle of a toast.
Why? she asked the girls at the Coffee Klatch,

but they just shrugged and said the town
was small, not that many folks
died in any given year. But by June

Mr. Gilman, who owned the monument works,
was beginning to complain,
though not loudly, and only to friends,

like Ed Simmons, who still jogged daily
at 63. And by mid-August
the mayor found himself looking away

when he passed his neighbors, and the good
Reverend E.J. Washburn
interrupted his sermon on sins of the flesh

to tell the story of Christ's Passion
and Death. For a while
everyone felt better. But by October

even Miss Alice's kindergartners
knew how many months it'd been
and so spent their recesses dying

in slow motion, rising after each collapse
with tighter smiles. Christmas,
that year, was grim, everyone reluctant

to open their presents, and New Year's Eve
was worse, all that champagne
losing its fizz in fancy glasses. Therefore,

in January, when the mayor finally drove
his Chevy Blazer into a bridge abutment,
Merlene and the girls sat all morning

at the Coffee Klatch, whispering "How awful"
and "Poor Marie" and ordering
refills of the decaf. It took a while for the word

to get around, though. That's why,
at basketball practice that afternoon,
Tom Weckwerth elbowed his best friend Joe Thompson

in the mouth, and when the blood came,
they stood there, panting
and staring at each other

with something like relief.

A Man in Black Shoes Walking Slowly
Because His Case Is Heavy

today the wind is here from far away, from the silent neighborhood
and invisible creatures are laughing
with the sound of ticking ten speed bikes
at all big sentences and pudgy fingers squashed by crusted rings

the man who sweeps the floor has cleared his countenance
of memory and that other language with the funny rhythm
he is the father of all edge and angle now
he brings the trees inside where they are safe
tiny black haired girls no bigger than thorns
run to keep up with their loaded mother
chattering to her of the actual world, its monsters and heros

out in the county
abandoned houses are invaded by wisteria
no more iris, no more nandina
they use pie tins there
to frighten deer away from their tender things
they put catfish under pine straw for safekeeping

people in the city, now,
they know all kind of tricks—he said, but he was fooling
crumbs of marble lay around the sleeping dragon
both of them a city blue
there's no law that says
you have to walk that way
like a chicken in a churchyard
while underneath the bones give in disgracefully
and shapeless forces have their way

Cup of Caution

Cup of grease
toxic grease
you waddle in and clamp on
like a rubber lock.

Sink stopper, fish gill, wet dog
I'm sucking moonshine
and you remind me of cancer.

Get off me cold toad
I want to be a woman
who knows pleasure
without slime.

4th Week

Blood, again. It's no wonder
I'm reeking, leaning out of the
morning, my hands planning lunch.
The gutters are swollen, the creeks
are riddled with squash colored
boughs, bobbing chunks in warm water

I keep waiting for you to know me.
This who I am raining
isn't the who I was passive
asleep under your first dating gaze.
Storms are taught in my lineage
to blow out of nowhere, twist
life from the corn, then melt

I'm sweeter for dullness:
brilliance makes sly
and rapacious love.
As I'm losing blood steadily
you'll notice the way I
keep up with your kiss.
I've more strength

than a steel piece, this
root in my hand, this knife
tipping into my womb

*

Even your stone is rotting
and this shallow pond dug under you
helps those migrating tides
listen for moonlight, and closer seas.

You already reek from sand
from beachgrass growing mold
half green, half gray, half blur.

You must be an old man by now
on shore, pushing off
and the relentless nights
that remember this place
are harvesting just one stone

star by star till all that's left
is scratched, leaking and you drink
from a stone going bad
before it could become a waterfall

and upstream the rapids, each rock
pressing under another rock
the way mountain ranges are lifted

one by one and from out the Earth
are slowly floating over it
and then the others.

*

The tree has no heat left, and there
its leaves shivering the way stars
are melted down before they freeze
kept dry, adrift on wood
that can't warm anyone
and under your fingernail, charred
icing over —you point out

where on the sky the garden tools
are rusting and every night
it's the same, there
the handheld radio full throttle
and in the other a chainsaw.

You are listening for static
give your fleecelined gloves
the names animals are called
and fish and there the ramp
the wing, the tail, the oil leaks
and between the landing lights
the promise, by tomorrow night

another shed, alongside
as if more logs could end the rain
with just sawdust and the radio louder

closer —you stack logs
the way rain is brought
from further than these stars
from some fire and you track the place
returning drop by drop
with your hands unable to open.

*

You shower the way a prisoner
is given the pressed suit, a ticket home
—you soak the faucets

to unlock some gate half iron
half both your wrists reaching around
for that smallbone smell

from, your legs just learning to walk
and the sun who has not named you yet
giving you another chance.

You will wrap the towel
so you can tell time by the knot
a new tie makes, folded into the Earth

holding it down while the evening
is sent back as waterfall
and overhead its huge millwheel

covering you with handfuls
and dirt ground fresh
for your shoes and shirt and rain.

The Split Maple Buckles Near Porter Field

She remembers the
smell of the red
clay, the dripping
roses, past the
yellow grass, behind

the sundial where
dogs were barking.
She can feel the
red flannel, too
warm by 3, tied

around the waist
she always wanted
smaller, cinched
in as Vera Ellen's
19 inch wasp waist.

She remembers
leaving the Girl
Scout hike, glad
to be one of those
picked for a secret

club with its rituals,
how one by one the
others climbed down
into the open grave
and scrambled up

to cheering, how
the metal lining
clanked under her
landing, the damp
walls icy in

shrivelling four
o clock light.
She can feel her
sweat go clammy,
arms rubber as she

tries to pull her
self up and slides
back as if earth
was the only quilt.
Her shorts become

the color of what
holds her. Before
it's dark, the others
pull her up, her
face burning. Years

later, skiing with
a boy whose tongue
will plunge into
her, she'll fall
into snow while he's

on the highest jump,
feel herself almost
drown in what she
can't hold on to
on her own, the

terror of arms
letting go, then
rage at herself for
trying to hold on
to what can't
hold her

Morning Prayers

What's left of sleep twitches in
the sharp crease moonlight leaves

on the slick pool of the retina.
All night ambulances lean

their sirens round the long
curving turn bordering the zoo.

At dawn I hear the gibbons howl
claiming the jungle

they left before they were born.
It is easy to get lost in the noise—

the night a girl's feet slapped
down the asphalt with a scream

attached to their fury
like a finger sliced

to the bone and dangling—
so that I wonder where I am,

thinking how many worlds
wake up lost trying to name

the blank swirling
white on the ceiling the moment

we open our dry mouths

Suede and Velour

Couldn't believe the sweep of the sun through the trees on December 20th in cloud-cover Michigan, sun like a pointillist mosaic across the still-green grass, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, wanted to walk down to the river and jump in and turn into a fish, or take off, eagle, owl, hawk, and perch on one of the branches of the sun-tree.

Who WAS that woman coming toward her, legs encased in dark brown, taut, twisted Lycraed cotton, and then brown suede boots and a wool miniskirt and a brown wool poncho, so perfect that she was surprised when she saw she must have been fifty or fifty-five, smiled at each other, The High Sign/Low Sign, but always The Sign, they always knew who they were,

The Purveyors of Spring,

Persephone coming back and the lips of the Earth open and sigh themselves awake,

a thousand Hallelujahs for Dawn Redwoods and another thousand for Castor Beans, two thousand for the toothed vagina of Datura/Jimson-Jamestown Weed,

descending into the botanical gardens now and seeing the sun setting across the river behind the Mother Of All Weeping Willows, still weeping even nude, nude branches like wet hair, blonde pagan giantess, shy in the nudity of Winter, the sun like a giant host descending over the river and hills, hearing, all of a sudden in her head, HODIE CHRISTUS NATUS EST,

HODIE

HOY

OGGI

TODAY,

Christ is (born, natal, nadal, natality) born—and the whole world turns, Christ the (Mot, Adonis, Osiris) Year-God, Sun-God, turning as the year turns, music out of her childhood in Wales, Warwick, Canterbury, wandering minstrel childhood, as it she'd never been born but was the eternal velour and suede-booted babushkaed, capped ageless Red Riding Hood in the eternal wood on the way to a Grandma who hadn't been eaten by a wolf at all but was there waiting like

her real grandma, the only room she could walk into where there was no blame or shame.

HODIE
CHRISTUS
NATUS
EST

Macabee menorah instead of host now, Knights Templar/ Malta, bringing back forks and razors to Aquitaine, civilization, what is it, feeling like dancing again, no one around on the campus now so close to Christmas, the fourteenth century so oriental,

fragrant with מור

MOR
MYRRH

and

ולבונה
LVONAH
FRANKINCENSE,

five more days and the old wrinkled Sun King would die and the Morning Star Quetzalcoatl Christking would begin his reign as year-god....

רַעֲיִתִי	יָפָה	הִנֵּנִי
RAYATI	YA FAH	HINAH,
Behold, YOU ARE FAIR, MY BELOVED,		
RAYAT		
RAJAH		
RAJAHRANI,		

as if (over the horizon now, the sun, and a sudden sense of abandonment and shrinking inside, dried, brittle flower soul) as if it were her fault, the divorce and Debbie's psychosis, Richard, screaming at her like a gargoyle air-raid siren, "It's your goddamned genes, this fucking female-tagged nut-chromosome....," her head flooding with aunts and cousins and her mother's methodical nastiness, Les Dialogues des Carmelites, one head after the (Terror) other, "Off with their (bracelets, rings, watches, earrings, all her little household gods) heads!"

Dusk, as brief as smoke, then dark.

How long had she been standing there?

HODIE
SATANAS
NATUS
EST,

the feeling of Evil palpable as pepper, garlic, gravel around her, suddenly cold and old and tired, six on her watch, walking to the bridge over the magic river, walking across it convinced it would break through like paper, and she'd be dumped in the iced tea water, surprised when it didn't happen.

Deo Gratias....for black suede boots and thick as sin velour skirts, cotton tights and a body, however briefly, to putter through Time in....

Into the Student Union.

Past the phones,
hearing her son's voice from Texas the night before.

"How did you get my number?"

"It's listed!"

"But how did you find out what city I was in?"

"I just kept trying. You had to be somewhere!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah...look, I don't judge you, for me you're neither good nor bad, you're just a bi-polar personality who needs chemical help, Haldol, something strongly anti-psychotic."

And he'd hung up.

There wouldn't be any Christmas or birthday card, anything at all, just contemptuous silence. He'd visit his father, talk to his sisters, but for her, NUDDINGS, as her grandmother used to say.

*Nuddings and dumplings,
And wish the world well,
bad sons and onions
can both go to Hell.*

Vicki sitting in the main lounge waiting for her. Their daily visit. Such an optimistic name, Vicki as in Victoria, Victoria Mundi, all 300 sodden, stinking, unwashed, unstroked pounds of her, completely ignored by her father, although she lived in his basement with the dog and the world gave him points, points, points for all the sham.

Fairest of my children, why do you weep amidst the sedge and hemlock?

She'd been such a darling, darkling baby, all the way up to the time when the psychosis struck, and then the voices and Haldol and....

"Hi, Mom!"

"Hi, Vicki!"

Eating a bag of pork rinds, the moon coming in through the big gothic windows of the main lounge now, no one else around.

The moon-voices whispering,

"If Jesus is the Sun, then Virgo is the Moon," and so she was, standing on the head of Satan on a half moon.

"You look so young, Mom," said Vicki, offering her a pork rind, seeing herself in the mirror on one of the support pillars holding up the gothic wood (universities = NeoGothicism) ceiling, 62, but, in spite of her pudgy roundness, she could have been 40, the brain the vastest of organs, to thy own self be feeling it secreting her face and skin, her smile and legs, like dripping stalactites in the cave of her skull.

And Then One Day

"And then one day" is how
the small boy learned all anecdotes begin

even those where women not his mother
come to sleep at the foot of his bed,
at least their yearning weight,
at least in dream.

One night a voice I knew
spoke my name outside of sleep
and I sat up, surprised.
Not an angel, for she brought no light
or comfort. Was she then a friend,
come to ask a cup of consciousness?

This will surely be a story to be told.
Of how she did not pause when I called out
but kept on, moving through,
persona without personality, a glider plane
with no engine but wind.

November Planting

For Janie Goldberg

Less than three weeks ago, sweet Jane,
You chose a spacious crystal bowl
In which to place your baker's dozen of paper-white bulbs
And set them free to do their majestic growing.
Periodically, passing from bedroom to kitchen,
We've marked their progress:
Vermiculate white roots spreading like creepers,
Larger than life for watery refraction;
Their slender green stems thrusting upwards
Like beams in a climbing skyscraper—
The entire fibrous network God's architecture.

This Sunday morning, we lie in our bed,
Uneager to leave sleep Vaughan Williams seeded
With his "Variations on Ten Notes from Henry Tallis"
As preludes to our own musical blooming—
Sending down roots, blending, tendrils exploding.
Eventually we awaken into November's silent greenhouse,
Brew coffee, then linger by the narcissus cluster
Orgasmic with white-petaled nebulae
Whose pungence is the same scent we remember
Inundating us last night
As we entered the earth together.

Proverbs

The old Latin masters (who never knew they were ancient)
saw how it worked, knew how sad and funny it
was, long before psychoanalysis
re-discovered the tragic tableaux.

One desperately kisses. The other offers a triumphant
cheek—while keeping an opportunistic eye
on the interesting, disdainful face
just outside the door. Lovers are like that,

never two equal fires, but a match, a flint
—the spark something else entirely that
doesn't truly belong to either. Now we've discovered
we're only tilted into sex by a random

gene: how every woman carries a trapped, eternal
boy in her, every man, his lost wild sister.
Spirits, angels, genies whisper out of the heart
into a heartless smile

that leaves you helpless. It's no surprise
we have to grow old before we get wise,
before we learn to distinguish
between nourishment and bait.

Craig

There is no town you do not find me in
calling with a throat full of smoke and booze
this time to tell me you've finally had it, are finally
going to drop out. And just as I picture you
hanging from your mother's ceiling fan, or splayed
against some guardrail, you assure me
you aren't that stupid, "I know
where to find you," you say.

Each time I wonder how it is I know you, some drunk
dodging Domestic Relations, faking names on applications.
I think of your daughter. You mean pony bottles of beer
and Marlboro Reds to me, nights driving everywhere,
our shoes making sparks on the highway as we flew
kinetic down the freeway, the stars
a handful of salt spilled across the sky.

Other mornings I'd see you asleep in the field hockey nets
out behind my house, sleeping off an acid hangover
some girl with you all fake leather and blue eyelids.
Your mother would call and ask me to hunt you down,
I'd find you in some apartment, your skin the dry
yellow-white cast of fluorescent light, the sofa torn on both arms
where you sat running a finger over the mirror,
crouched over like you could leap in and disappear.

Nights you'd be
at my window, face pressed against the glass, your eyes
two thumb holes in clay as you asked for money, food,
mostly a place to sleep, your wheezy snore
like a zipper going up and down.

So you find your way to me this morning, bragging
about the bottle of Wild Turkey before noon,
downers straightened out in front of you like Christmas lights.
And I feel the distance, the black thread of phone wire
stitching its length into me, and once more I tell you

I remember, yeah man I remember, any lie to keep you
suspended
believing nothing's changed, that we are those boys,
anything to stop the full glass of hours
that breaks in your voice.

Sunday Ducks

The air is filled with flapping
when ducks like no others descend from the sky,
feathers mottled, faces melted to meanness
by long and blistered beaks.
So this is why our bread and yellow popcorn
could not lure the resident ducks—
they heard the portent of this wild swooping
and stayed midpond, their heads, necks, chests, wings,
forming arcs of precarious grace.
The invaders slow the water's circles, mount,
and as one does he turns a face of dun to us,
as if by our design his crooked beak,
the blinding sun, the stagnant air,
the oily feathers of his mate.
We lick ice cream—the day is hot—
and flatten grass with bare and restless feet,
disappointed that they would not follow us and eat,
so watch instead the strange ducks rock
and hammer with their grave distorted beaks
the heads of pretty mates who paddle crayon orange feet,
delivering them to the brutal life
dunked and very nearly drowned.

Restless Night

the trucks in me
all night drove with their back doors
gaping open and the men who rode inside grabbed
at each other's passing
arms when they turned corners
violently and some were hurled out
onto the street with broken
heads and then their bodies
twitched until the passing cars pressed
into them and i
was driving

For Najeema, 6, Who Admitted
To Hitting Renee

Trenton told you before the teacher
did, *people do bad*
things if they start touching people

But girl, our hands have more touches
than shapes waiting to get out of wood:
a bucked dancer or a floating bird

Your hands have more ways
than kinds of animals came
out of Noah's ark: you have

touches for the faces of the blind
touches especially for the heads of children
touches so new they're hiding in
your hands, Najeema. Go lay them on.

Unbalanced Load

They knock the streetlights out with rocks to darken the way past peeling paint frames of rotting houses. I don't know the who or the why but I know they do. So I use the light from neon beer signs in bar windows—red, blue, green, yellow—careful to avoid the men leaning up against the wall by the door with shoulders rolled forward, and hands shoved in pants pockets. They are waiting—for what, an opportunity? They see a young woman alone. Maybe it's been a long time since they had a young woman alone. They give me hate looks. Even if it's not me they're hating, they'd like to let it out on me. I walk with strong hard steps and a straight on hard face that says I am not victim material.

I cross the street, away, my long dark coat blending in, grip my basket full of clothes, dirty underwear exposed, laundry detergent.

Stretches of black asphalt feel firm under my feet, but the steam rising out of the man-hole covers reminds me of the gaping space of sewer below. The dark rivers of warm fecal water and the dark bodies that scurry there, under my feet.

The street at night is not a place I am supposed to be. I could plan, count the pairs of underwear left and go on a Saturday. But then there is the Saturday crowd—young mothers and fathers, toddlers rolling around on the dirty floor, the men-boys with fermenting duffel bags full, the old women with scarfs covering pink rollers of thinning grey hair and runs in their stockings—crowding around the washers, filling up the aisles and benches, blocking my way to the dryers so I drop clean clothes off the pile in my arms onto the floor. Too many strangers to do laundry with. Weeknights are different.

Light shines out the laundromat windows onto the sidewalk. Even at night I can see the drab green paint of the outside. It's the kind of color you'd see on a palette and think Why? Why mix all that brown in so instead of grass you think of mud? I try not to think of what kind of person picked that color. But I know someone did. Someone picked it. It did not get there itself.

The floor to ceiling laundromat windows are just asking to be shot out. I can look in and see the rows of white washers and the army-green dryers. In one big window, a neon sign hangs—red block letters say LAUNDROMAT. I can picture all this glass shattering, spraying into

the inside as gun fire lights up the passing car, an old tan Buick with its headlights off.

I open the door and walk in. The light is strange. It is that fluorescent blue white that seems to vibrate if I stare at it a long time. The air seems to be full of moving particles. I see the atoms crashing together and breaking apart. I look back and watch the door close behind me.

All day, hot water and soap have mixed to kill bacteria, making the air thick and moist, full of the smell of Spring-fresh scent. Sweat, urine, shit, oils, dandruff, blood, come, earwax, snot washed away. The fermented odor gone, replaced with Spring-fresh scent. That is what I like, the promise of clean clothes. I like to pull a cotton sweater to my face and sniff it while it's still warm from the dryer and soft. I like to put my face down in the pile of warm clothes and feel that softness on my skin. If I had my own washer, I would strip naked when I did the laundry. Sit there naked and waiting. Start clean before the dirtying began again. But I like the dirtying too. I like stretched-out jeans that get soft and loose by the third or fourth day and aren't too tight in the butt.

I am not alone. I hear the hum of the washers, the thump, thump, thump of an unbalanced load, and heavy breathing. Heavy breathing with grunts mixed in. I do not have to see over the row of washers to know what's on the other side of the floor there. Those are not animals fucking.

This is not a place to be shy, so I sit my hamper by the washers in front of me, but close to the door just in case. The row of washers in front of me, the fuckers on the other side of the washers, dryers at one end, wood benches and door behind me, more wood benches and an old man sitting quiet at the other end, in the corner, with a view of the fuckers. That is the set up. I know my place. I have the space by the door. I ease up the lid of one washer, lift the lid of another.

Ok, maybe I have watched too many episodes of America's Most Wanted, Cops, Dragnet, the Mod Squad, Hawaii 5-0, and all those others. Maybe the seed had already been planted when I was a girl. I used to get so excited by those shows I kept a file of spies, my Mission Impossible team, made tapes that gave them their instructions that were supposed to self-destruct in five seconds. It is that same feeling. I start down the aisle to see real life TV.

At the edge of the row of washers, I peek around. There on the floor is a black tennis shoe with a hole where the big toe pushed its way through. Sex is like walking into the ocean—the cold freezing my breath inside me, the waves knocking into my chest, the water wrapping itself around my legs and pulling.

When I see the couple I stare. That is what they want, an audience. To them, sex is boring in a bed in a bedroom with the curtains pulled tight to keep out the daylight. But in a laundromat it takes on a new dimension.

I have watched porn movies and tried to feel passive, but I never really could. Just the proximity of sex starts the tingling. The tingling starts now. Water is pulling me down, like the time I waded into the bay only to look up at the sign hanging down from the freeway bridge that said "Caution: Dangerous Undertow" and the list of names on it of the ones that had been pulled under, and then I felt my own legs going out from under me as if I could walk sideways.

Still I watch. I watch this young guy's butt tighten and loosen while he pumps away. His palms on the floor hold him up. His back arched. Pants shoved around ankles and white jockey underwear his mother bought him rolled down with the pants. His head is flung back in a show of ecstasy, his face toward the ceiling. No wonder they are bored. He is not a good fuck. He frowns and smiles both with eyes closed.

The girl's arms are holding on tight to his back so he doesn't pump himself right off of her. Her legs are locked around him and not letting go for anything, pulling him down. Her skirt is bunched up around her waist. Her shirt pulled up so he can play with her breasts. I stare at her hair thrown behind her, a brown mop. A few strands lay across her face, in her mouth. Her face! Her fat lips wet and open with a smile that curls at the edges. Her breath comes out in hard bursts. Her eyes are blown open from the inside. I can't smell them, the Spring-fresh scent is too strong. A groan starts low in his chest and works its way up and out his mouth that is hanging open.

On this floor. On this floor where mud and salt have smeared and dried in swirls and footprints. On this floor covered with cigarette butts, gum, lint, trash, stray detergent, they fuck. I have seen dogs do it with more love. And I am watching. That's what they want, so I look away.

I look up only to see someone's underwear floating in circles in

the dryer—striped boxers, green nylon, red. I step back, walk back the way I came, back to my clothes.

I look down into the empty washer tub before I put my clothes in and stare. The good thing is that seeing real sex still affects me, even if it's bad. I look at the holes for the water to pour through and the pieces of pink lint glued to the sides. I reach my hand in and rub it along the metal tub, poke my finger in a hole, wipe the lint off with my fingers and wad it up. The tingling starts and a memory picture—the time in the gym with my boyfriend, falling down onto the mat in the wrestling room, pulling my pants down while I stuck my tongue in his mouth while the rest of the PE class played volleyball.

I pull clothes out of the hamper and let the memory fade, ignore that impulse that says Think about it. I throw my clothes into the washers, darks in one, lights in another. The old man in the corner can't see me pull out my underwear, my socks, my shirts, my stretched out panty hose still holding my shape. I don't like to be watched when I do this, especially by a crazy. The ones that watch by putting on the vacant stare will not turn away. Even when I look at them and squint like I am a killer. But I am not stupid. I ignore the crazies because they may be violent. But I always want to glare at them and say, Yes they're dirty. Yes they stink.

I pour the soap in, line my quarters up in the coin slots. I slam the coin holders in and out. The loud "kachink, kachink" says I am here then all I hear is the sound of water rushing into the tubs, which is fine with me. I don't need to be getting horny since it could be a long time before I get to experience it first hand.

I sit down on the bench nearest my wash and keep my coat on, buttoned, but then I unbutton it, fold my arms and look down. I stare at a button on my coat because I forgot to bring something to read and thoughts begin to come. I remember a roller coaster ride with a guy. The car was clicking up the incline slowly and as we reached the peak he looked over at me and said "Enjoy!" It was his teeth I remember most, big white ones that he showed me. "Scream and raise your arms," he said. I was light and when I felt myself lifting out of the seat I grabbed the bars and held on, but I did scream.

Someone is watching me. I know the way you can feel the eyes on you before you see them. It's the old man, he's scooted down the bench closer toward me so quiet I hadn't heard. The fuckers are quiet, maybe they are done and the old man ran out of things to watch.

Shit, I hate to be stared at, especially in this weird light where everything seems to glow like some surreal movie. I button my coat and look at the tiles on the floor, a chip in one that shows the black underneath.

I look up. The man has moved closer still. He can see right down the aisle where I am. He is not ten feet away and I can see him perfectly. An old guy. Fed too well so that he is thick and condensed looking with jowls that hang down. He is tightly packed, probably a flannel shirt under that jacket and a t-shirt under that, and he has big bluegrey eyes with lots of white around the pupils. He is staring at me. Crazy or no, I finger the mace in my coat pocket, prepared to spray, and stare him right into those big blues that don't seem mean. They're not like the eyes of the men in front of the bar. These eyes seem vacant, like he is staring at a television screen. I am confused as to what he is, but instinct says it is not too bad. Maybe he is like me. Just when I think this he leans toward me and says in a whisper, "There are rats in here. Big ones."

I snort. I have to. A pushed back-in laugh only makes it violent. "Those aren't rats!" I say with a smile and eyebrows raised. He is just retarded or something, maybe crazy, maybe heavily sedated. His eyes do have that look of too much medication.

"Won't those two be surprised," he says, nods toward the fuckers on the other side of the washers, and smiles. Maybe he meant rats. He looks around the floor and under the bench. "Big ones," he says.

Now he has my attention. "You've seen them in here?" I say.

His eyebrows go up in the middle, make two points, but his lips don't smile. He opens his mouth to speak and closes it. So I say "What makes you think they'll come out?"

"It's feeding time." This makes him smile. He looks at me a second and then gets up and moves back over to where he was sitting before, like he knows that will get me. Now I can't see anyone. I know they're here, but I don't know what they are doing. The groaning picks up intensity again, breathing loud enough to be heard over the washer hum.

Before I go over there I know I will. I have to see. When I first moved here what I felt was fear, but that went away, or mingled with some strange form of curiosity that grips me worse. The old man does not look at me when I sit down next to him. He is not watching the fuckers still going at it, but the dark corner by his foot and the

chunk of cheddar cheese waiting there. He looks like my father did, waiting for a fish to snag the hook, the rod to bend forward, the line to stir, cause the water to ripple out in circles and bigger circles. I am not scared of him now, because he reminds me of this. Maybe this is screwed up, but I've forgotten how my father made me feel and I like this remembering. The old man says, "Can you hear the gnawing? Listen" All I hear is the hum of the washer and groans.

He is looking at me now. He wants me to hear. Just like my father when he said, "See that. That's a catfish. They eat the trash off the bottom," before he tossed the fish back. Part of me knows this is not the same but that part gets overruled.

We listen. The old man whispers, "They do it to sharpen their teeth—gnaw—at pieces of insulation in the walls, at the exposed wood, at the cords connecting the cables." He looks back at the crack between dryer and wall. I stare at his long nose and thick cheeks, let my eyes sink down to the floor. A black nose appears, and whiskers, out from the dark crack between dryer and wall. I can't believe my luck, but stand up on the bench and squat down, just in case. I don't want direct contact.

The whole rat is out, but not going for the cheese. It runs, runs up the aisle toward the fuckers.

The girl lets out a scream that makes me grab my breast where my heart is and hold it. For a second I am waiting for the glass to shatter from a drive-by shooting. The old man is still and watching. The girl plants her hands on top the washer and vaults herself onto the top of the washer—her shirt falling down, her skirt falling down and covering her. The guy is not so lucky. He is pulling his pants up as the rat runs by him. He thinks to grab his shoes before he climbs the washers and stands up on a lid. His pants unzipped and hanging open, he puts his shoes on first. His hair short in back but long in front and parted on the side. He is looking down trying to buckle his belt, his hair in his face blocking his vision, his hands fumbling.

"Rats" the man next to me says, smiling a smile that creeps up under the folds of skin on his cheeks.

The rat is running the circuit around the washers. It turns the corner and heads back down toward me—small pointy face and small round black eyes fixed on me, long whiskers like a cat but not like a cat. It runs right by me and up around the other aisle again. I think Maybe it's rabid. Maybe it's insane. Maybe this old man's got it trained.

Thick and long like a mole, fast as hell, compact and hard with short rough greasy hair, tail like a piece of leather shoestring, dragging along behind. The man lets out a laugh. "Look at him go!" he says.

"God damn," the guy yells, looking like someone just woke him up, "You didn't have to yell in my ear."

"That thing ran right by me," she yells back. She flips her head back and her hair flies.

"You didn't have to scream in my ear."

"You're an asshole," she screams. She hits at his chest with her fists but he grabs her wrists. So now their arms swing together as she tries to break free but he is strong and holds on. The old man and I, we watch. Without looking away from them the man says "That's what you get for doing the nasty."

I look at him and smile because he is evil.

"Let go of me," the girl screams. She stops fighting him and stands there limp. They sink down onto the washers and sit staring at the wall, quiet, their shirts untucked and their hair a mess. The rat is gone. Back into the crack I guess. The man and I look at each other. Show's over.

He smiles and with eyebrows raised says, "Want to feed them?" His eyebrows are so long they curl up. He unzips his jacket and reaches into the inner pocket, out of it he pulls half a chunk of cheddar cheese.

I take it out of his hand and look it over. I look around for the rat, "He's gone."

"He'll be back, with the others."

I look at the cheese, the couple still staring. I look out the window at the dark street, see a man walking on the other side, too dark to make him out. I want to be home, but not yet. I want to know I can go home when I want, safe, be there in a second.

We wait. I hold my position on top the bench near the cheese. It doesn't take much waiting. The whiskers and nose appear, then the body, then another. I look at the old man. He puts his index finger to his lips and says, "Shhh."

There are about five big ones and one runt. The biggest one reaches with his head, grabs the cheese with his teeth and his wide open mouth, swallows it whole. "Give 'em some more." I forgot. I break off a few pieces of cheese and throw it to them. They jump for it, like pigeons, but these are rats, big ones, with hard bodies and sharp teeth that they show. Their pink wet mouths hang open to catch

the incoming cheese. I throw all I have and they grab it all, look at me waiting. The old man pulls another pack of cheese from his pocket. He comes prepared. He probably spends half his social security check on cheese.

I take the cheese from him and rip the plastic open with my teeth. I dig into the cheese with my fingernails to break off a chunk. I throw it at the rats. They squeak and gather around me, running around at my feet and I don't know about this anymore. It is starting to scare me. I am floating out of it and above, watching all this happen from the ceiling.

My laundry starts the spin cycle. Dirty water drains from the tub and the clothes stick to the sides as the tub spins around. Hot steamy water pours back in, the steam escaping through the cracks in the lid. Then that water starts to drain and the tub spins and clacks. It is probably my jeans that starts the thumping. The light comes on: unbalanced load.

The girl screams. She is holding a mass of hair in one hand and pointing at the feasting rats. What she must think! I laugh and can't stop until I hear the short burst of the old man laughing too. His laughs come out of his chest in stops and starts. Weird. The guy grabs her and pulls her. They jump off the washers. That makes the rats start to squeal and scatter, just like a giant box of detergent had come down in the middle of them, they spray out down the aisles, a few straight to a hole between the dryers and the wall. The guy and the girl run—it's not far to the door—but their path intersects with the rats and the guy's foot comes down on a tail. The rat digs its teeth right into his shoe. The guy screams "Ehhhhh" and swings his foot around. The girl kicks at the rat's body to get it off. The old man screams "Stop!" and jumps up off the bench. I didn't know he had so much speed, gets to the girl in no time and grabs her. She squirms in his arms, turns herself, and hits the old man with her fists and he takes it, trying to hold on to her.

My washers click in unison and I can hear the winding down of the spin cycle. I listen until the spinning stops but I am not here. I walked over to my washer, five feet from the fighting. I hear the screams and grunts and squeals of a struggle but it is not real. It goes in my ears and makes a noise there but it is like the feedback I always hear, only louder. It is blending with the dark street of my walk home. It is the strangeness that tells me I don't know anything. They have

gotten inside my head. It is this place. It eats its way inside you.

All I want is clean clothes and I have them, except the ones I'm wearing. I pull heavy wet clothes out of the wash and throw them into my hamper. I walk over to the dryers and throw my clothes in, put my money in the slot, slam the coin holder in, push the glowing red button. That feels real, touching the button. I see myself do it. My clothes tumble around, already they look lighter, the jeans, the towels, pairs of underwear, a sock. I watch my clothes go around and around.

The people are gone. I am alone. The rats, I don't know where they are. I listen, but I only hear the hum of the dryer. The old man passes by the window and looks in, his arms wrapped around himself, he looks at me. In the strange half light I think he is a ghost, my father. I think I am alone.

I am safe at home, folding my clothes while they are still warm. Humid Spring-fresh scent fills my apartment. I put my clothes away in my drawers, in the closet. I take a hot bath, shave my legs and soap down. My mother says showers are better. When you take a bath, you just end up washing yourself with dirty water. I pull the plug and watch the cloudy water spiral down the drain. Soap scum and shaved pieces of leg hair mark the water line.

I put on a fresh, clean nightgown, underwear, and sheets on my bed, get under the covers. I lay in the dark and listen to the quiet, sniff in the clean, let my mind go blank. But it is not quiet. There is the sound of gnawing, soft at first but then they are eating away, at the walls in the kitchen, at the cord to the refrigerator, at my napkins, in the trash can. They will finish in there and work their way to my room, to my dresser. They will gnaw at my underwear to sharpen their teeth and use the scraps for bedding. The sound is soothing. It lulls me into sleep.

Lines on a New Chivalry

I.

I once apologized for saying fuck
in front of women. I apologized
again when someone made me realize
the fault was not in fuck but getting stuck
in courtly vestiges, delicacy
that masquerades the patronizing smile.
How many times must I rewalk that mile
'til my awakening's not illusory?
My father taught me, *Never hit a girl.*
Now I must learn that when he also said,
Always knock the winger off the puck,
it must apply in either gender's world:
Old game, new rules for how it's fairly played,
like sonnets that employ a word like fuck.

II.

I once attempted to compose light verse
expressing revised sensibility.
Beginning and ending in a vulgar curse,
it lacked, I admit, delicacy.
But that was its stated strategy.
I tried to wipe the blackboard so clean
demanding even hockey's brutality
should never serve as an excuse to demean.
But now I think I got it reversed:
Expanding brutishness to include females
(and only for the sake of rhyming a curse)
focuses attention on the wrong details.
Both genders should reject enmity
and win a pacifist androgyny.

III.

Androgyny! Did I really say that?
Have I become such a placid bore
that I should envision the sexless snore
a cure to the millennial gender spat?
Identical parts never fasten so well
as when you have a key and can lock it,
as when you have a plug and a socket—
virgin or castrato, a tough sell.
If we admit each gender has virtues
peculiar to itself, *name one* of Men
that, if stated, will not raise the cry
of sexism. While Woman gets her dues
for everything from Anima to Zen,
say “Men’s Studies,” you get fried, or Blyed.

IV.

Damn it, now see what I have gone and done.
I’d wanted to improve gender relations,
and find I’ve almost joined the right-wing scum
who try to claim reverse discrimination.
I take it back, sorry, I’m well aware
Men’s Studies is another way to name
the crap we always had in school back there
In pre-enlightenment days. Accept the blame
Oh my brothers! Cease these vain defensive
attempts to make excuses and explain.
Labor instead to forge a new expansive
Chivalry: mutual respect the one refrain,
with gentleness the means and end of power,
like a sonnet that draws its force from a flower.

If Fog

A decision to mist vision, to vaguely erase and unexplain and
drain, of color of cooler making everything oh maybe soothing or
not true. Through, they move, always travelling through, not to
or from, not coming or going or running or slowly they through
whitely walk foggily, nothing and no one and gone.

Fishermen at Night

Statues, plaid and swearing,
stand fierce in their
grainy stillness with
eyebrows like grumpy
birds, and they mutter
words that slap
the lake and fade.

Their reels buzz, chatter,
the green-white lights
hiss back with glowing anger,
everyone is mad, black
midnight frowns over water.
Splash and flap and another
fish dies in a bucket,
steely scales scraping
against thin dripping tin,
and a dozen drunken men
lined like poles along the
railing cold and hollow
and gray as them,
laugh in loud dry rasps
and feel the pull of string.

Deathwatch on the Potomac

This is the slow work of piecing a life
back together, insomnia in mental wards,
dawns gazing out on snow, crows
calling out from the cottonwoods
like Lowell, anguished
over a syllable, the blue shells
of robins' eggs on the path today
where I've walked often, and lost
my way at times, searching for an owl's feather
at James Wright's grave, or the hoofprints
of a desert ram out there
among the saguaros where Hayduke
buried Ed Abbey in his sleeping bag,
myths, the ragged edges of a lifetime,
loveletters exhumed from steamer trunks
where poems go to die, affairs as brief
as a match, or a moth's life
drawn to a bowl of lamplit water.

These are the loose ends,
threads of recovery I encounter each day,
fields plowed under to conserve
what little soil remains
after a dry winter, the mummified
corpse of a carp, the paw
of some small creature left in a trap,
and Nixon dying of a stroke, I heard it
on the radio, and rushed home
to find this poem waiting among
the cherry blossoms of Arlington,
the man who declared he wouldn't be:
"the first American President to lose a war"
and had dogs loosed on the crowd
gathered on the steps of the capitol.
How have the years gone by?
I pick up a thread,

and find blood on the face of a friend,
a thin, anemic boy who hitchhiked from Colorado
to hold another bleeding in his arms.
Petals swirled in the street
like the leavings of a light snow
that had recently fallen across the river.

Lounge Acts

1.

paint brush bristles prick her body
coloring her naked neon
blue and marlboro red

and she dances, moving slowly
like a house cat wanting
to sleep in the sun

and she dances, a motion
picture moving and flat, a screen
we all watch from pinching

wooden chairs
and soft black-red booths like mouths
that swallow suck and lick

and she is the elements in this lounge
breathed up air, gray and white
lit smoke

from round red asshole fires
and the water she drinks
from bathroom sink cleaning
her throat and spitting up
a salty tasting twenty bucks

and she dances, blue music bruises
and cuts dull dagger rhythms
from upright bass, Les Paul lead guitar
and drums beat down in the corner

and the music lives, a razor
in her ears
and the music escapes, a virus

from her mouth to his
in five dollar poison kisses

2.

come 3:15 we leave with her
and she dances
on uneven apartment floors
on yellow beds too soft
cherry vodka from a bag
and she swallows
soaking wet cigars
and we ask her
who she is and
"I am Fishsex"
"I am Loved One" she sings
"I am boiling, baby"
and she dances,
eating blue ice on the bed
and still bleeding
motor oil from her ears

Firetruck

the audio is hot/listen

to Porno for Pyros peakingout screaming in my eyes
somebody handed me a bloody rag oh that rag got thick

& red & I

can feel the woofers poof like a glaucoma exam at every single down
beat

(off camera) I can hear mom telling this pink girlfriend
laugh at my mangled left hand at The Velvet Underground
at my SOS pad

& mom comes

back on Donna Mills

cuts my fucking steak

asks to

snakeskin my rare intestine zipper

ankleboot

& I refuse

sighting summertime fat rolls/sighting my own
inability to eat

drypowder-wafer lithographs

of Michael Jordan sleeping in stainless steel tub of wholemilk

instead I suggest the upright bass

instead I suggest something that swings

—like Benny Goodman

& she tries to tell me I can't even play the line to "Walking
on the Moon"

& I say what about channel

49

& this scrambled signal soft-core porn all about the vertical hold

purple breasts black lines four read hands

black lines soaping up green rear ends

black lines through blink-blue showers

& my mother tells me don't watch

she slips behind dressing

screen morphs into Iggy Pop telling me *Yes, I've had it in the ear*

before morphs into this dark little one

I sweat all over two daytime summers

ago DOO DOO DOO DOO DOO I don't
get her name right she says it
ain't Mar-Sha it's Mar-Sea-Uh Spanish name & I sight
same spelling in time for us two to pop open like time lapse
a driller bee
photographs of venus flytrap swallowing

Painted Bride Quarterly
is pleased to announce the winners
of its Second Annual Fiction Contest:

First Place: Lisa Borders
"Peace"

Second Place: D. S. Sulaitis
"The Nest"

Judged by Denise Gess

The winning stories
appear on the following pages.

Peace

My father died in July, and by November everything was broken: the air-conditioner, the toaster, two clock-radios and the timer on my mother's stove. The pantry door was hanging by a single hinge, and the sliding doors to my bedroom closet were simply propped against one another, completely off their tracks. We'd turn doorknobs, and they would come off in our hands; flip a switch, a fuse would blow. My mother said it was like living on "Candid Camera"; she expected Allen Funt to come out any minute and tell us it was all a gag.

At my father's funeral, my Uncle Gene had slapped me on the back and told me I was now the man of the family. Yet the only thing broken in the house that I actually knew how to fix — the pilot light for the two right-hand burners on my mother's range, which I had seen my father light a hundred times—my mother wouldn't let me touch because I was only 11 and she was afraid I'd blow myself up. Since she never seemed to get around to lighting the pilot, she was left with only two working burners out of four.

The repairs at home were nothing, though, compared to what it took to keep the car wash running. The car wash was pretty much our sole inheritance from my father; he had tied all his savings up in it, thinking it would be a great side business. "I've done all the research," I remember him saying. "Car washes are real money-makers." Because my father was a scientist by profession, his research would never have been disputed, by my mother or me. Still, it had become apparent even before he died that the car wash was not making that much money. All it had seemed to do was take up most of my father's spare time, with the constant maintenance required on the machinery. The work had not been difficult for my father, who could do everything from installing a carburetor to sequencing DNA. For my mother, however, the car wash ran less than smoothly.

It wasn't until the night of the presidential election that it occurred to me how difficult all this was for my mother. Before that night, I could see little beyond my own grief, which I struggled to hide by developing obsessions with my school work and the lyrics to pop songs. To this day I can recite the major bones of the human body, list in order the eras of geologic time, and sing every song that was an AM radio hit in 1972.

We had staged a mock election in school, which Nixon won, the influence of our suburban parents being still quite strong in sixth grade. Since it was a secret ballot, I would have voted for McGovern had my father been alive, to rebel against him without him ever knowing. Once he was dead, though, it seemed to me he knew and could see everything, like God. I had to vote for Nixon, because my father would have known if I hadn't.

I was thinking about the election as I walked to the car wash after school that afternoon. When I got there I found a long line of cars, which I followed until I reached my mother, on her knees, pulling greasy lengths of chain by armfuls from the pit at the back end of the track. The chain was always snagging, backing up the line of cars and driving business away.

"Hi, Mom," I said, peering into the oily shaft that housed the track's machinery. "There's a whole line of cars out there."

"I know," she said, still gathering chain.

I looked up at the workers, who were leaning against the building. There were six of them, young men with long hair and beards and bell-bottoms, their skins a reddish-brown that looked like a combination of sunburn and grime. Two of them were smoking cigarettes. None made a move to help my mother.

The line was now backed up as far around the building as I could see. While my mother worked I stared at a grimy blue Chevy, the first in line. White streaks of road salt covered the windows like the soap my friend Pete and I had smeared on a neighbor's windshield Halloween night. The woman behind the wheel was tapping her fingers impatiently on the dashboard. The man next in line was out of his car, leaning against it, staring at my mother.

"Maybe you should call that repairman to fix it," I said to her.

"I'd love to call that man," she snapped. "But do you know how much that man charges?"

Some of the workers laughed. They always seemed to be laughing at my mother, but they had never laughed at my father. I wondered if they would vote for McGovern, or if they wouldn't vote at all.

Mom stood up. "Randy," she called to one of the workers, "hit the button."

"You sure you got your hands outta there?" he asked with mock-concern. My mother and I glared at him. "Just hit the damn button!" she snapped. He did, and the machinery groaned for a second, then

sprang to life. The metal rollers that pushed the cars through soap, rinse and wax were traveling around at the right pace. My mother sighed, relieved. I knew she had no idea of what she'd done, but she'd managed to fix it again.

I struggled to shut the lid which cased the lower end of the track's spine. The six employees still leaned against the wall, watching me.

"Watch your fingers!" I heard my mother yell to me as the lid snapped in place, and then, in a harsh voice to the men, "What are you looking at? Get these cars on the track."

Now she looked at me, and it was a look that said I was the only thing on her mind at that moment. It reminded me of the mother she had been before my father died. She had been busy then, too, with gardening and my Cub Scout troop and the PTA, but she had always been waiting for me when I got home.

"How was school?" she asked.

"Okay," I said. "Not much homework. Want me to cashier for the rest of the day?"

"Sure," Mom said, wiping sweat from her forehead with a dirt-streaked blue rag. I walked with her to the cashier's counter, where she exchanged the greasy sweater she was wearing for one of the clean ones she kept in a box beneath the register. She put over it an old jacket of my father's, a navy blue quilted one I could remember him wearing while he raked leaves the previous fall. She looked out the window, and I followed her eyes to the two kids she'd hired the week before. They were cheating on windows again: they'd jump in a car, barely pass a dry towel over the windows, and lumber out without even a squirt of window cleaner. My mother left me in charge of the cash register and went outside, slamming the door like my father would have.

Through the window, I saw her shouting at the hippies. I saw them nod, saw them snicker when she turned her back and walked away. One of them had a big yellow peace sign stitched on the back of his jacket. He was at least as tall as my father, about six feet. I wished I was big enough to beat him up.

I spent the afternoon ringing up the customers, watching as each car made its way through the wash. The elephant brush lowered gently onto a windshield, spinning, a massive gray mop shooting drops of water into the air with its speed. It reminded me of the spin art Pete and I had done at a fair when we were in second grade. Next, the wrap-around

brushes: thin, bony, their metal arms angled like elbows.

When business got slow, I studied everything around me. I fingered the keys on the cash register; I wrote up charge slips for imaginary services that cost thousands of dollars, being careful to rip them up when I was finished; I alternately messed up and straightened the rows of pine-scented air fresheners, shaped like little trees, which lined the wall behind me.

I considered taking down the Halloween decorations which were still hanging, a week past the time they should have been removed. There were two black cats, a few tissue-paper cobwebs and a witch silhouette, but it was the fluorescent skeleton that caught my eye. I forced myself to look at it, relieved that it didn't scare me. Even the skeleton in my classroom, a real skeleton, didn't scare me much when I was there, in the daytime. Skeletons only bothered me when I thought about them at night.

On the way home that evening my mother asked me what I wanted for dinner .

"I don't care," I said, pressing every button in turn on the AM radio. I heard a Dairy Queen commercial, Don McLean's "American Pie," Cher singing "Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves," America doing "A Horse with No Name." When we were in the car, the radio commanded most of my attention.

"How's about we get a pizza?" Mom asked.

"Great," I said, still pressing the buttons.

"And a salad," my mother added. "Pizza and salad, okay?"

"Sure," I said. I had finally settled on a station that was playing Michael Jackson's "Rockin' Robin." I started singing, "All the little birdies on jaybird street..."

"You know, that's a remake," Mom said.

"No it's not."

"Yes it is, Chris. I remember the original."

"Who sang it?"

She was quiet for a minute. "I can't remember who did it, but believe me, it's a remake."

"No it's not," I muttered, too faint for her to hear.

We stopped at a Quik-Mart so Mom could buy lettuce, and I went across the street to get the pizza. I ordered what had become our usual—small, extra cheese—and played an Elton John song, "Rocket

Man,” on the jukebox while I waited. When the song was over, a girl with long, straight blonde hair walked over to the jukebox, where I was still standing. She was an older girl; at least 16, or so she seemed to me at the time. She had on a skirt made from old pairs of blue jeans. It reached the floor.

“You gonna play another Elton John song?” she asked me, and even though she smiled when she said it, I wished I’d played the Who, or the Rolling Stones, the kind of music I’d heard at Pete’s house. Pete had an older brother.

“Nope,” I said to the girl. “Just waitin’ for my pizza.”

She smiled again and studied the jukebox. She was much prettier than any of the girls in my sixth-grade class. She was very thin; I could see her collarbones, running in two ridges above the neck of her peasant blouse. I was trying to think of something else to say to her when my order came up. Disappointed that I’d let the moment go by, I paid, picked up the pizza and was on my way out the door when she called to me.

“Hey,” she said, “what’s your name?”

“Chris,” I said, shifting from foot to foot, the pizza box flat on my palm like a waiter’s tray. For a second I thought that maybe I looked older than I really was, and maybe, just maybe, she thought I was close to her age.

“Peace, Chris,” she said, and flashed me a two-fingered V.

“Bye,” I said, and backed out the door. Her face was still in my mind as I crossed the street, but as I got closer to my mother’s car I found myself wondering about the peace sign she’d flashed me. I wanted to know what peace meant to her; if it was just something to say, like “hi” or “bye,” or if she was honestly wishing me some kind of inner peace, wishing the world an end of hostilities. I knew some people, like the hippie at the car wash with the peace sign on his jacket, didn’t mean anything at all by it. My father used to say that all hippies were cowards; that was why the peace sign looked like a chicken’s foot. Cowards and druggies, I could remember my father saying, watching the news.

“Mom,” I said on the way home, “do you think all hippies are on drugs?”

“A lot of them, I think,” she said absently.

“Even the girls?”

“Some of them,” she said. “Probably not all. Why?”

“Just wondering.”

Our dog, Lady, was asleep on the living room couch when we got home. It seemed she had finally given up on ever seeing my father again. For most of the summer Lady had sat at the dining room window every night and waited, hours past dinnertime, until my mother dragged the collie from the window and brought her up to bed.

When Dad was alive, the dog wasn't allowed on the couch; but all the rules had changed. When Dad was alive, I wasn't allowed to do my homework in front of the TV, either, but now Mom never seemed to notice. Or maybe she did, but to her it was like the dripping shower, the knobless doors: small things that weren't worth fighting over when there was so much more to worry about.

After dinner I sat under the dining room table for a while with Lady; she looked like she needed some company. I was thinking about the car wash, how tired I was of going there every day after school. I vowed to start spending more after school time with Pete. Usually if I hung around his house long enough, his mother would invite me over for dinner. It wasn't that I liked his mother's cooking that much; in fact, my mom had always been a better cook. It was just much more fun over there, with Pete's brother and sister and his father, whose hands were thick and callused from the construction work he did. Pete's dad was different from mine, but he did okay in a pinch.

I was surprised to hear my mother's voice from beyond the edge of the table. "Chris, why don't you invite a friend over for dinner tomorrow?" she asked, kneeling and lifting the edge of the tablecloth. "I'll make spaghetti." It was scary, like she'd read my thoughts. It was the kind of mother she'd been before.

"Okay," I said, and squeaked one of the dog's toys to signify that she, too, approved. Before my mother got up she wiped her hand on the dining room rug. It was coated with dog hair when she picked it up. She examined the hair for a minute and then brushed it back onto the floor, carefully, as if not to disturb what order was left in the house.

"Before you go to bed, would you check my math?" she asked, standing up so that all I could see were her legs below the edge of the tablecloth. "The books are on the couch." She meant the bookkeeping for the car wash.

"Sure," I replied. I'd intended to ask her to check my math, the way Dad used to. It had been a game with us; my numbers always came out right, but I knew Dad loved to check them. Every now and then I would

throw in a wrong answer on purpose, as much to test my father as to give him something to correct.

I lay on my stomach and watched my mother walk into the living room. I imagined the bones in her legs, moving as she walked: the tibia and fibula, the patella, the femur. I tried not to imagine my mother's bones, but couldn't stop, so I went up her skeleton, to the coccyx, pelvis, vertebrae column, rib cage, sternum, clavicles, skull. I'd gotten 100% on my bones quiz the previous week; I'd studied hard. My father had always said that people were afraid of the unknown, and that once you understood something, like technology, it was no longer scary. I had found this not to be true, at least as far as skeletons were concerned.

I couldn't remember if I had been afraid of the skeleton the first night after its arrival in my classroom, or if I'd gradually become frightened as the days and nights had gone by. The first thing that had bothered me was when Pete asked our teacher, Mrs. Craig, if it was a real skeleton or plastic.

"Oh, it's a real human skeleton," she said.

I'd seen skeletons in horror movies and "Night Gallery" episodes, but I'd never thought before about whether they were real. If they'd once belonged to someone.

"Well, whose skeleton is it?" I finally asked Mrs. Craig, but she didn't seem to know.

I crawled out from under the table. Lady didn't follow, so I called her, coaxing. We both plunked at the foot of the couch, next to Mom, who was stretched out with the payroll books. I tugged one of the books over to me without looking at my mother. If I looked at her again, I'd have to think about her bones. It was better to concentrate on the numbers. I liked numbers; they always meant the same thing, they never changed. There was no skin stretched over them, nothing hidden underneath.

The TV was on with the volume turned down low. I could hear Walter Cronkite reporting the early returns. He was already predicting a landslide for Nixon.

"Damn," Mom said, loud enough that it startled me. "I forgot to vote today."

I was glad to think about the election, as I had earlier in the day. Nixon and McGovern were interchangeable with Rowan and Martin, with lists of the Allies and the Axis countries, with the lyrics to my pop songs. If I squeezed enough trivia into my brain, there would be no room left for unwelcome thoughts.

"Who would you have voted for, Mom?" I asked.

"Hmm. Let me think. Well, you know who your father would have voted for."

"Nixon."

"Of course."

"What about you, Mom?" It was the first time I'd ever considered that my mother might have different opinions than my father. The idea was intriguing.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "Neither one of them will help us much." She picked up an old scientific journal of my father's and began flipping through it nervously, as if she thought he might speak to her through the pages.

"Time for bed," Mom said, a little while after McGovern conceded defeat. I still had one of the payroll books open on my lap, but I wasn't really looking at it. I headed upstairs with Lady as my mother shut out the lights and turned down the heat.

This was the part I hated most: going upstairs, walking past that door before I could get to the light switch in the hallway.

Lady was behind me, fur brushing against my leg. The door to my parents' old bedroom was to my right, closed, as always. I couldn't see it in the dark, but I could feel it. I tried not to think of it. I was almost to the light switch, and if I could make it there without thinking of it, maybe I wouldn't think about it all night. Maybe I'd never have to think of it again. But before I reached the switch, I saw it. I saw the skeleton in the closet. This time it was naked, standing among my father's clothes. Sometimes it wore one of his hats, or a necktie.

I'd first heard the expression when I was little: "That Joe Reynolds," my father once said of one of our neighbors, "he really has a few skeletons in his closet."

I must have been five, maybe six. I'd gone to bed that night and stared at my closet door, thinking of all the skeletons that might be inside. I'd imagined them playing instruments, tambourines and drums, and I must have dreamed about it because I woke up screaming. When Dad came in and asked me what was wrong, I told him I was afraid of the skeletons in the closet. He pulled me out of bed and opened the closet door, carefully checking every corner. When I still wasn't satisfied, he sat down with me inside the closet and told me about the things that had scared him when he was little, dragons and giant scorpions and Frankenstein monsters, and how they weren't real. By the time I'd fallen

asleep, I was no longer afraid, but there was no one to talk to now. Dad was gone, and I was too old to believe in skeletons in the closet.

I hit the light switch, and yellow brightness flooded the hallway. I stared at the door to my parents' bedroom. There was no point in going in; nothing would be there. I'd checked once, creeping into the room one night after my mother was asleep, swinging my baseball bat in front of me, terrified but ready to smash the skeleton to bits of bone dust. I'd flung open the closet door, but nothing was there. I'd known all along there wouldn't be.

My mother came up, and we took our places in the guest room: me in the bed near the window, Mom in the one by the door. We'd been sleeping in that spare room since my father's death. It wasn't something we'd ever discussed, it just came about naturally; the night my father died, my mother had simply taken her pillow from the bed she and Dad had shared, and shuffled down the hall to the extra room. I'd made no move to go to my room, just watched her, and finally she'd said, "You can sleep in here with me, Chris, if you want." Five months later, I still couldn't imagine sleeping in my own room, by myself.

We said our goodnights, and Mom turned out the light. I could hear her shallow breathing almost instantly, but I lay awake, eyes closed. I tried to think about the World Series, the face of the girl I'd seen in the pizza parlor, the words to "Jumping Jack Flash," multiplication tables. I was up to $7 \times 6 = 42$ when I saw it: a skeleton wearing my mother's clothes. I rolled over and listened, but just then I couldn't hear her breathing. Lady was snoring, but I couldn't hear my mother. I told myself I'd hear her in a minute, and continued through the table: $7 \times 7 = 49$. $7 \times 8 = 56$. I saw the skeleton again, looming over my mother's bed. I opened my eyes, and saw nothing but black, and in the blackness the only sound was Lady's snoring. I couldn't tell if my mother had stopped breathing or if Lady's snoring was drowning out the sound of it, so I swung my leg out and kicked my mother's bed and she sat up, as always, with a gasp. I then rolled over and pretended to be asleep.

It was much later when I woke up and heard nothing at all in the room. I sat up, and could make out in the darkness that both my mother and Lady were gone. I climbed out of bed, and shivered in the cold; we'd been having trouble with the thermostat, and apparently it was acting up again. I put on my bathrobe and cracked the door open. Light was coming from downstairs.

I walked softly to the top landing of the staircase, where I could peer down, over the banister, into the living room. My mother was sitting cross-legged in the middle of the floor, Lady stretched out a short distance from her. She was surrounded by lit candles, thick, broad-based ones I'd never seen before. She'd arranged them in a semicircle. The scientific journal was on the floor next to her.

"Ed, damnit, why won't you talk to me? I need help," she was saying. If she was crying, it was silently, and I couldn't see her face well enough to tell for sure. She began repeating my father's name: "Ed, Ed, Ed."

I crept back upstairs as quickly and soundlessly as possible. I'd heard girls at school talk about seances they'd had at slumber parties; one girl, Trisha, had told me and Pete about a seance where the candle she and her friends had lit blew out, and then they heard knocks on the windows, moans from outside. She found out later, though, that her brother and his friends were behind it.

I was afraid, for the first time ever, to approach my mother; my mother, who insisted on salad with pizza, who pulled chains out of the car wash track, who hired and fired young men and yelled at them when they got lazy, was trying to call my father back from the dead. I sat in the darkness of the upstairs hallway outside my parents' old room—that room which had frightened me for months, the room where the skeleton lived in the closet—and listened carefully to her voice from downstairs, the desperate way she repeated his name. I listened until it became a nonsense syllable, ed, ed, ed, something rhythmic like the rolling of the track at the car wash, as steady as the brushes performing at their intervals.

I considered going back to bed, pretending to be asleep. The thought that she was as afraid as I was seemed more than I could bear, until another possibility occurred to me: maybe, she was even more frightened than I was.

The idea of it gave me a different feeling, an odd kind of strength that could protect me from hippies, from skeletons, from anything that waited for me in the night. I stared at the closed door to my parents' old room, and went through the nine times table while I made a decision. When I was finished I got up, slowly made my way back down the stairs, and waited for my mother to see me.

The Nest

Orange is a strange color. I can't think of anything natural as orange, except the fruit, which looks waxy, tough, unreal- the skin tastes bad. It's the stuff underneath, the meat that's pale, soft, juicy. This, I swear is how men see women. Orange.

I'm not real to him. The felt man, moving up Broadway with briefcase of display fabric samples. Felt is for kindergarteners, I tell him. It's weird. Why can't you sell chintz?

I like to touch, he tells me. The thing about felt? He goes on, is that it's functional, you can do what you want with it.

I'm not sure why I love him, he's too short, with a shuffle to his walk and web feet that cause him pain. He's only got patches of hair left, that curl and fall out in clumps. We're clandestine lovers.

At night he likes to fall asleep with the TV on. Usually we're in a hotel, somewhere downtown. He likes TV gun fights. And it's during one of these evenings, loud gun shots, that I fall into a deep sleep.

I'm holding felt man's undershirt. It's soaked in blood. I fear police. They'll think I murdered him. I tie the bloody shirt around my waist, hiding it beneath a sweater. I get on a train to Long Island.

My parents argue in the basement. I'm in my old bedroom. The blood has dried. There's no time to waste. I can bury the shirt. I can burn it. But I know police will find it. I always see police as men.

I awake and reach over to touch felt man. His presence pulls me deep into nightmares. Unfortunately he always gets murdered. Am I the one who kills him?

His wife is young, wears thick eye make-up and one of those long hair in back, short and fluffy up front hair dos. It's like she can't make up her mind. My hair is cut short-tomboy style.

He likes my flat chest, rubs it a bit too hard because it's probably more like fabric than body. He gets to touch real breasts on his buxom wife. He says they're big, scary, and have a mind of their own.

A year passes, then another. Things don't change. He keeps telling me that he'll leave his wife, but not right now. She's got ovary problems. She needs him.

I begin to build a nest. I take a subway up to Central Park, gather twigs and leaves in a big bag, and take them home. Off the living area, in an alcove, I arrange twigs and leaves in a small circle. I will need a lot of them. And mud too.

It takes me a month to build the nest. I do it early in the morning, like birds. I've dumped bags of potting soil in buckets and mix up water and carry handfuls to the nest and pat and shape small round walls, up around me.

Felt man never comes to my apartment, but one night I insist.

"Someone might see me," he says.

"Like who?"

"A neighbor."

"So? What are the chances they'll know you?"

"I sell a lot of felt. I know people."

I hang up. I know it's immature of me. But I get angry a lot. I can't yell, or I'll look ugly to him, so I do these childish things.

That night he buzzes then knocks at my door. "Come in," I shout. "The door's unlocked."

"Where are you my creampuff?" He says. I hear steps. He's taking off shoes, thump, thump, puts down briefcase of samples.

"Creampuff?" He calls.

"I'm in here, nesting."

"Resting?"

"Nesting."

He pokes his head from behind the wall. Stares. I'm in the nest, squatting, in my robe.

He laughs, nervous. "What's this?"

"I built it."

"What for?"

"What are nests for?" I ask him.

"Eggs," he says, then, "Does this have to do with my wife's ovaries?"

"Nests," I tell him, "are also for protection."

He doesn't say anything. I know this type of crazy behavior can drive a man away from his mistress.

"Do you love me?" I ask.

"You know how I feel. Now get up out of there. You're muddy. Look at your hands." Now he's laughing, kind of.

That night, while asleep, alone, I dream again that felt man is murdered. Someone has torn off his arms, covered his face with a bright blue square of felt.

In the morning I put some oranges in the nest. Three oranges. I spend a lot of time arranging them just so.

And then something happens. For the first time in two years felt man does not phone me at exactly 6 PM. I don't know the plan for tonight. Which hotel? Or is he staying home? Perhaps after years of calling, he assumes I should just show up at the hotel. I dress up in high heels and a white dress and go to Washington Square Hotel and wait in the lobby. An hour passes. He never shows up.

A week later, on a Sunday, I'm sitting in the nest. It's hot and I'm naked, skin against the cool mud. A horrible week. He never phoned. I start to think that maybe he died of a heart attack. I want to phone his home, but I'm tired and scared. My eyes keep shutting closed. I want to rest, here, against these branches and leaves.

After another week passes, I try calling his home. I'm nervous. His wife answers. She sounds frail. At first I can't speak. It's silent. After, "Hello? Hello? Hello?" she says, "I know who you are. You. You are responsible."

I panic and hang up.

Responsible for what?

Has he left her? Has he been murdered?

That night there's a buzz, then knock at my door, and I peer through the peephole and there's felt man, skinny and ghostly.

I see him differently through a peephole, all distorted, alien-like, even though he's right there, he's far away.

"I've been calling you," he lies. His footsteps are light. He's wearing funny, soft shoes.

I ignore him and go to my nest and eat an orange. He follows. Takes off his clothes.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

"I want to climb in with you. Looks cozy. Should I get a blanket?"

"There's no room for you. Besides, that's not the way it goes. You're supposed to go out and get worms and bring them to me, and the babies."

“What babies? Those are oranges. And you’re eating one!”

After I peel the rinds I tuck them into the crevices of the nest.

We sleep together and he gets up before dawn, climbs out of the nest, goes to his briefcase and rummages through papers and samples. He snaps the briefcase shut. That is the last time I ever see him.

That night I hear about a death on the news. A man is found stabbed to death near Washington Square Hotel. I’m on my bed peeling another orange. Ironically felt man has left behind felt samples and I know, real calm, that I must burn them. Or bury them. But for now I shut off the TV.

Is it him? Is he really dead?

I believe so.

In the days that pass, again I call his home. His wife answers. I don’t speak. She sounds drugged. She slurs, asking, “Is that you?” I hang up.

I’ve got to take down the nest, vacuum the debris, the mud, sticks, leaves and orange rinds. It was all so comfortable. But it’s starting to smell.

One, Two, Many Times

If the girl thinks to save it in tissue, to save it in cloth, to scoop it up onto the lip of her spoon, the boy will compare it to vegetables. This one the size of a lima bean, that one, a kidney. No part of her body now.

She hopes to be fruitful. They wish to multiply.

“Even small as this its flesh is ninety percent water.”

Like you and me, the boy will say.

I have cried tears more solid than that, the girl will reply.

The girl’s largest one was a tomato.

This largest one, rather, had the heavy, watery weight of a tomato, though it sat in her womb with the misshapen shape of a tuber. Those red ones that you boil.

The girl is eating foods to make her belly grow. The girl, of course, favors fruits, smooth skinned and straining. The girl pops into her mouth grapes that she has smeared in a pot of soft butter. “Not now,” the boy says as they copulate. They copulate early. For gods sakes, he pleads. The girl rolls the grape from side to side in her mouth. The boy moans. The girl sucks out the juice. She spits out the seed. The girl is hoping for a jicima.

But she is not a lucky girl.

Hush little baby, the boy says.

He says, Don’t cry wolf.

Do not cry wolf.

The girl’s smallest is this one.

This one, a mere lentil.

So very small, this one is, that if it fell out of her onto the ground, when she was camping, say, not even a dog would bound up and poke in his nose. Not even a blue tic hound. So pitifully small, this one is, that should the seizing up, letting go, sliding-out-of-her happen the girl would have plenty of time to pick the thing up. To lick the sand off of it with just the tippest tip of her tongue.

The girl would have plenty of sixty second minutes to wrap this one in her panties and carry it back to town.

Play Me Accordion Paper Dolls

feed me NutraSweet promises on a fork
let me lipsinc Sugar Daddy
swallow you like an aspirin

stick on my tongue
lick me clean
play me accordion paper dolls
grown into themselves
like the braided ficus

cut my fingers free
from the women lined up
like a history
like a family
like a codex

in skirts & lacy bonds
of attraction to a magnet to a nova to a sun

fly me to the red planet
mercury in your cigar
boil me clean to the glue stuck
to the palm
of the hand stories
to the fingertips & lips
of kindergarten
slice me a snowflake
& look at my lattice pelvis
like a screen door

baby I'm barely here
so bleed me a staple for a mouth
feed me the wax of bayberry
feed me the amaranth cult

Lament of the Icecream Man in the Snow.

*"There are the Alps. What is there to say about them?
They don't make sense."*

Basil Bunting

Today I want to take the easy Alpath,
enroundain mountfontain peaks
where the godown waterdom
lanimelts the slin rosenblue
and camerad motourists glib
the snow escape Itamilian cielolinea
onto small silverspecked rolls in the dark
belliedangle boxes.
Doubleyedglootonery,
I'll squaltch mount&berries
into snow scones. Come'all, come
Mr Kneeguerrebroker,
Lady pettiedpanty,
Gerturde und Guignolet
lost in blue front hier,
come'all,
a quarter a piece
before it melts!

Unnatural

Once the Valedictorian, now the father, you watch him flap the stage, earring and sunglasses glinting as his name which is not the same as yours melts into another. The question had become not one of rank at graduation but of a degree; four years taken from you could not be regathered like the apples from a basket he smashed. Wedding his mother, moving his room like leftovers from a tag sale, you gave him the chance to reinvent himself. Your sentences scraped nothing, not even membrane of sleep. Did he hear phone calls you made, lies you told for his body that would not get out of bed, his fist through walls, doors? Did fighting ease the anger, or did he know that his younger brothers were just outside the door, listening to him curse at you?

Guns and Roses, *Pink Floyd* or *AC/DC* blasted through on CDs you had paid for, on speakers too large, too heavy to be hung from chains anchored to the ceiling. *Nirvana* gave him the words: "chokin' on the ashes; all we know is all we are." He lets you know that it's not sticks and stones but words that can hurt you hurling, "Jagger's an old dude, just like you man. Both of you should've packed it in before you hit thirty, showed some real class and pulled a Cobain."

Guilt has grown stale like water standing too long in a glass. Too much about injustice, the divorce. Too much bailing water from a ship, holes left by the father, the natural father, he will never find. How can you speak of the man? The word "step" is salt he rubs in your skin each day. After he spit in your face, you learned how unnatural this son, your love could be. No smile or wave in your direction as he holds the diploma aloft, the only sign he'll give to you is a turning, the way a leaf must to the sun. Grafted, your life has not taken.

After the ceremony, you go to the shore to celebrate, to eat.
He punches rocks into water as if Long Island Sound could be
filled with stone. If the two of you were on either end of a boat
separated by mist and not blood, this son, this unnatural son,
knows he would not need to call to you but could sit waiting
for the slushing of your oars. No sextant, nothing is left for you
but to hold steady, rowing blind in fog that might not lift.

from *Our Peasant Love*

I want to carry one of your breasts in my pocket, everyday, or a slice of buttocks or thigh. Just a snack, a morsel, bite-sized, some little thing to reassure, to hearten me, to squeeze in a crowd, to count on (one, two, three) waiting for the bus, say, not thinking of hygiene or responsibility. I need you, that's all, constantly—like car keys or a rosary: that hidden prayer to fondle, literally. Small friction of a nipple when things get tough.

Contributors' Notes

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Lisa Borders lives in Philadelphia. Her short stories have been published in *Black Warrior Review*, *Snake Nation Review*, *Agassiz Review*, and previously in *PBQ*. She is the recipient of a 1995 Fellowship from the Pennsylvania Council of the Arts.

Louis Daniel Brodsky is the author of nineteen volumes of poetry as well as eight scholarly volumes on Nobel Laureate William Faulkner. His biography of Faulkner, *William Faulkner, Life Glimpses*, was published in 1990 by the University of Texas Press. His poetry has appeared in *Harper's*, *American Scholar*, and *Southern Review*. His most recent book of poetry, *Capital Cafe: Poems of Redneck, U.S.A.*, appeared in December, 1993, from Time Being Books of St. Louis, Missouri, as will his next, *Disappearing in Mississippi Latitudes: Volume Two of a Mississippi Trilogy*. Five books of his poetry are currently being translated for French publication by Editions Gallimard of Paris.

Sean Brendan-Brown is a 1994 graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop. His work has appeared in *Snake Nation Review*, *Fuel*, *Windsor Review*, *Jeopardy*, *Duckabush Journal*, *West Wind Review*, and *Prism International*.

Kristen Burkholder is a Gettysburg resident who holds degrees in both English and theater. Her writing has recently appeared in *Manna*.

Susan Cavanaugh's poetry has recently appeared in *Coastal Forest Review* and is forthcoming in *Yankee*. Her work has achieved two Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards, and her chapbook, *The Good Sense of a Bird*, made the 1994 "Summer Picks" listing in *The Small Press Review*. A native of Massachusettes, she presently resides in Ocean City, NJ.

Lisa Coffman's poetry has been published in *River City*, *The Southern Review*, and *West Branch*.

Charlene Fix teaches English at the Columbus College of Art and Design in Columbus, Ohio. A 1993 recipient of an Ohio Arts Council fellowship, she has recently been published in *Chicago Review*. Further work will also appear in a forthcoming *Hiram Poetry Review*.

Faulkner Fox lives in Durham, North Carolina, where she writes and works as legislative director for the North Carolina affiliate of the National Abortion Rights Action League.

Hugh Fox has just completed *Off the Road*, a literary memoir spanning thirty-seven years. He teaches Freshman Composition at Michigan State as if it were a graduate course in Trans-Pacific and Trans-Atlantic influences on the ancient Americas.

Charles Freeland lives and writes in Fayetteville, AR.

Maria Goodman is a 1993 Hollins College graduate whose work has appeared in the *Berkeley Poetry Review*. Currently, she publishes a zine entitled *Don't Say Uh-Oh!*

Robert Gregory lives and writes in Miami, FL.

Jay Griswold graduated from Colorado State University in 1979 with a masters degree in creative writing. For the past ten years he has worked as a park ranger for the Colorado Division of Parks, primarily on the water patrol. His first chapbook, *Meditations for the Year of the Horse*, was published by Leaping Mountain Press in 1986. He has been widely published in reviews and journals, including *Literary Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *New Mexico Humanities Review*, *PulpSmith*, and many others. He was a 1990 recipient of an Ingram Merrill Foundation Award, and co-edits the multicultural journal *Red Dirt* with his partner Lorna Dee Cervantes.

Joan Cusack Handler is a Certified Psychologist in clinical practice in New York City, where she also completed her Master of Arts Degree in Creative Writing at New York University. Winner of the Chester H. Jones Foundation National Poetry Competition for 1992 and the Gloucester County College National Poetry Competition for 1992, Ms. Handler has also received awards from the National Writers Club, Negative Capability: Eve of St. Agnes Competition, 1992 Roberts Writing Awards, National League of American Pen Women, Georgia State Poetry Society and Passaic County College. Ms. Handler's poems have appeared in *Agni*, *Feminist Studies*, *Madison Review*, *Negative Capability* and *Wisconsin Review*, among others. A member of the Board of Governors of the Poetry Society of America for 1993-94, she lives in Fort Lee, New Jersey and East Hampton, Long Island with her husband and 12 year old son.

Ernie Hilbert Jr. has been published in *Long Shot*, *Figment* and *Red Dancefloor*, among others. His chapbook, *Lust the Experiment*, has recently been published by Red Dancefloor Press. He is currently enrolled at Oxford University, where he is researching English poetry of the First World War.

David Jauss' poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Nation*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, and *Indiana Review*. He has served as editor of two anthologies: *The Best of Crazyhorse: Thirty Years of Poetry and Fiction* (with Phillip Dacey) and *Strong Measures: Contemporary American Poetry in Traditional Forms*. In 1993 Mr. Jauss was the recipient of an NEA Creative Writing Fellowship.

Lyn Lifshin is the author of many collections of poetry, including *Madonna Who Shifts for Herself* and *Kiss the Skin Off*. She recently edited *Tangled Vines: Poems to Celebrate and Explore the Relationship Between Mothers and Daughters*. A documentary by Mary Ann Lynch, *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made of Glass*, was recently produced about the poet.

Daniel Lusk is a two-time recipient of Literature Fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and he has also received residency fellowships to Yaddo and The MacDowell Colony. His poem "North Iowa Pachyderms: A Geography," was nominated by *Laurel Review* for a Pushcart Prize. Mr. Lusk's work has recently appeared in *New Letters*, *North American Review*, and *Northern Review*, among others.

Anthony Madrid is a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Arizona. His poetry is expected to appear in forthcoming issues of *New England Review* and *Poetry Northwest*.

Louis McKee lives, teaches and writes in Philadelphia, PA. *Oranges* (1989) is the most recent of his five collections of poetry. His essays appear regularly in *Swamp Root*, *Contact II*, and *Painted Bride Quarterly*.

William Minor has published five books of poetry (*Poet Santa Cruz: Number Four*, his latest), short fiction in national journals, and much jazz writing (*JazzTimes*, *Down Beat*, *Coda*); a book, *Unzipped Souls: A Jazz Journey Through the Soviet Union*, will be out in early June, from Temple University Press.

Lynne Butler Oaks lives and writes in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Simon Perchik has published ten books of poetry and individual poems in many periodicals including *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, and *The New Yorker*. His latest book of poetry, *The Emptiness Between My Hands*, is forthcoming from Dusty Dog Press.

Charles Rafferty's new book of poetry, *The Man on the Tower*, will be published by the University of Arkansas Press early in 1995.

Spencer Reece's poem "Ghazals for Spring" was one of fifteen finalists for the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Council in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In addition to recent poems published in *Boulevard*, Mr. Reece's work will appear in a forthcoming issue of *The Santa Barbara Review*. He lives in Northfield, Minnesota.

Katrina Roberts lives and teaches in Cambridge, MA. Her work has appeared and is forthcoming in a number of journals, including: *The Antioch Review*, *Negative Capability*, *North Atlantic Review*, and *The Southern Poetry Review*, and in the anthologies: *Life on the Line* and *The Best American Poetry 1995*.

E.M. Schorb has published three collections of poetry: *The Poor Boy and Other Poems*, *Like the Fall of Rome & Other Humanitarian Disasters* and *50 Poems*. His poetry has appeared in *The Yale Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, and, most recently, *The Literary Review* and *The American Scholar*.

Jean-Marc Sens was born in France and educated in Paris. Currently, he lives in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where he has been studying and teaching at the University for the past six years. He has published translations into French of Hart Crane's *Key*

West and "Voyages," and his own work has appeared in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Black River Review*, *Cape Rock*, *International Poetry Review*, *Nexus*, *Faultline*, *Context South*, *The Crucible*, and *Cimarron Review*.

Vivian Shipley directs the creative writing program at SCSU and serves as the Associate Editor of both *The Connecticut Review* and *The New York Quarterly*. Her last book, *Poems Out of Harlan County*, was published by Joe Bruchac at Ithaca House, and her next book, *Devil's Lane*, will be published by Sue Walker at Negative Capability Press. She has poems forthcoming in *Aura*, *Amelia*, *Negative Capability*, and *Embers*.

Laura Sims' poetry will appear in forthcoming issues of *Camellia* and *Malcontent*.

David Staudt was awarded the 1992 Corson-Bishop Prize for Poetry, in addition to which he has received Cornell's Academy of American Poets Award. His poetry has appeared in *Greensboro Review*, *The Cape Rock*, *Appalachian Heritage*, and *Chattahoochee Review*.

D. S. Sulaitis lives and writes in New York City.

Carroll Susco has been published in *The Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Short Fiction by Women*, *Bluff City*, and *The New Jersey Review*, among others. She lives in Pittsburgh.

David Swerdlow's poems have appeared in *The Ohio Review*, *The Cream City Review*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *Willow Springs*, and elsewhere. He teaches literature at Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania.

William Varner received an MA in writing from the University of New Hampshire in 1993. His poems have appeared recently in *Poet Lore* and *Green Mountains Review*, and another of his poems is forthcoming in *Poetry New York*. He lives and works in Portsmouth, NH.

Joe Vena lives in Haddon Heights, NJ. This is his first published work. He does a great Tom Jones impersonation.

Jon Volkmer teaches English and creative writing at Ursinus College. His poetry has been published in *Carolina Quarterly*, *South Dakota Review*, *Hellas* and *Dancing Shadow*.

Michele Wade is an anthropology major at Indiana State University. She also serves as a correspondent for a local Indiana newspaper.

Jim Walker is a newspaper journalist living and working in Indianapolis.

Ellen Wehle is an MFA student and associate editor of *Gulf Stream*. A native Philadelphian, she lives in Fort Lauderdale where she hopes to find a second South Street.

The staff and editors of *Painted Bride Quarterly* wish to thank the following groups and individuals for their generosity, time, and talent.

Laurie Anderson
 J. T. Barbarese
 Gwendolyn Brooks
 Stephen Dunn
 Steve Edelman
 Frank Emanuel
 Kathy Emerson
 Denise Gess
 Leonard Gontarek
 Wang Hui-Ming
 Major Jackson
 Cecily Kellogg
 Cindy Kligerman
 Teresa Leo
 Michael Mason
 Tom Sayers Ellis
 Sonia Sanchez
 Lisa Zeidner

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Third Annual Fiction Contest

Maximum 15 pages doubled spaced.
 Reading fee \$6 per story.

Prizes:

First Place: \$50.
 Second Place: \$25.

Winning stories will be featured in an
 upcoming issue of *PBQ*.

Deadline: June 30, 1995

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Writers are invited to submit 16–20 pages of
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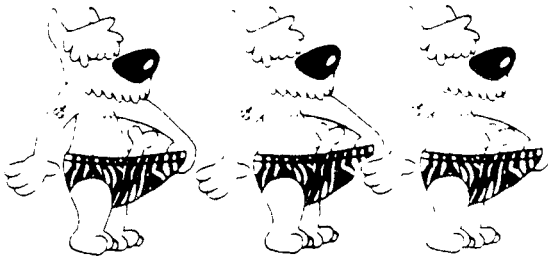
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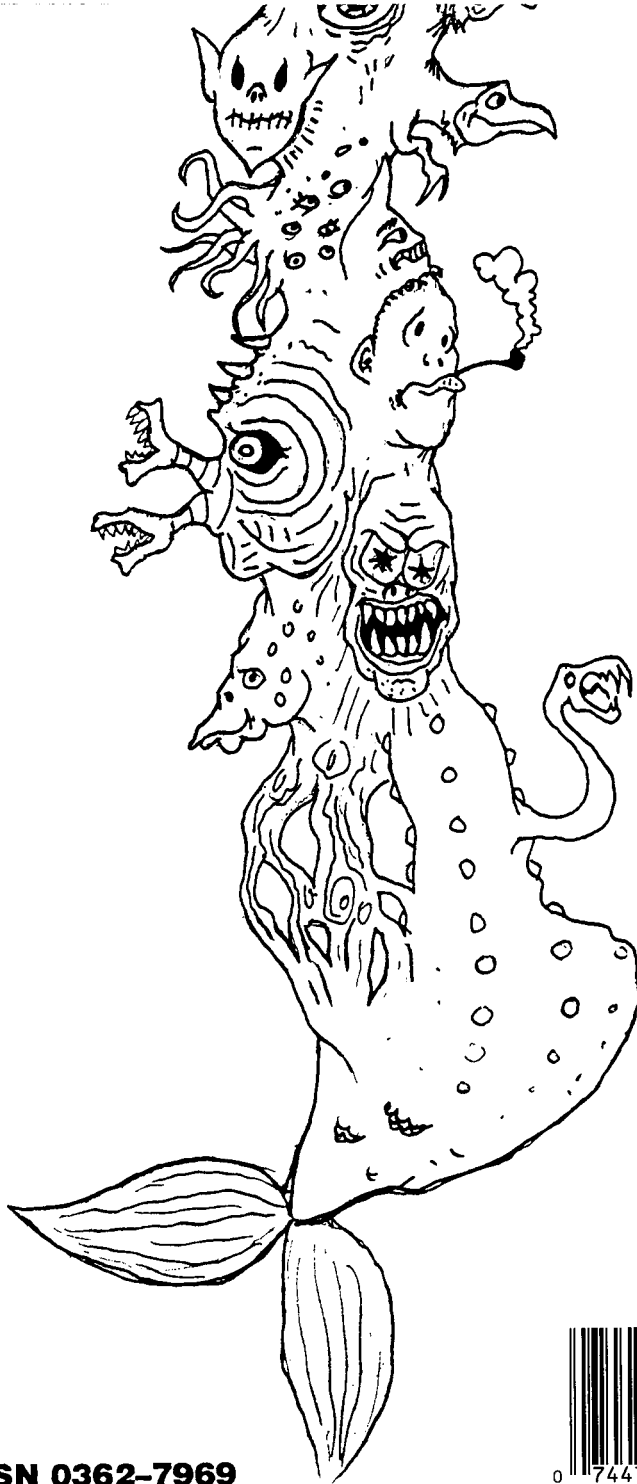
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