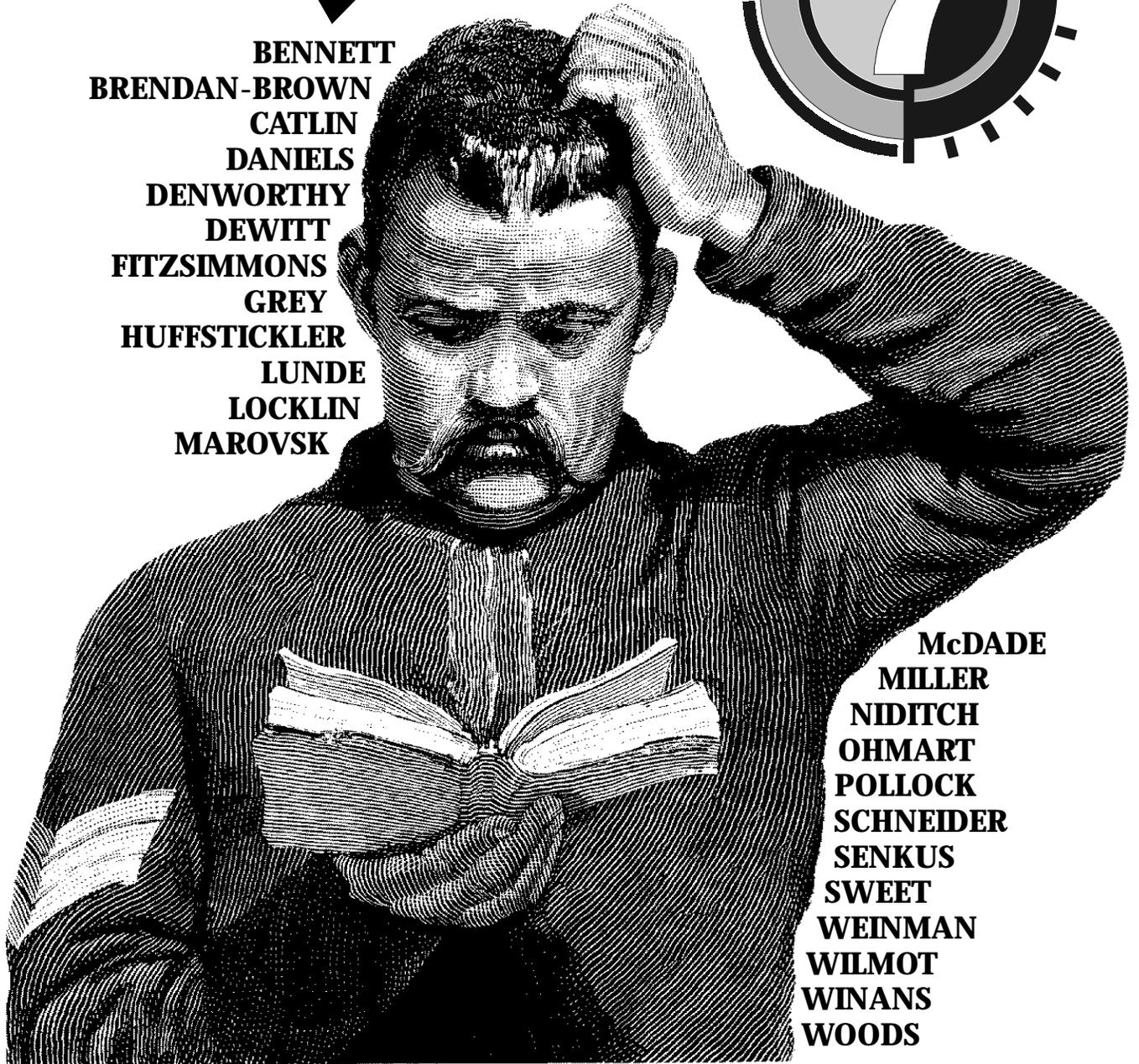


First Class



**BENNETT
BRENDAN-BROWN
CATLIN
DANIELS
DENWORTHY
DEWITT
FITZSIMMONS
GREY
HUFFSTICKLER
LUNDE
LOCKLIN
MAROVSK**



**McDADE
MILLER
NIDITCH
OHMART
POLLOCK
SCHNEIDER
SENKUS
SWEET
WEINMAN
WILMOT
WINANS
WOODS**

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**ISSUE
SEVEN**

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Dancing On Pillows

JOHN BENNETT

Dexter woke up in the middle of the night and began dancing on the pillows. His wife slipped out of bed and went as far away as she could get in her nightgown, the kitchen table where she sat in the dark smoking Dexter's cigarettes one after the other. The dog followed her out but went left where she went right, across the no man's land of the living room rug to drop down by the front door; he stared out thru the bottom panes of glass, his head resting on his paws, at the 3 a.m. darkness.

Even while he's dancing, Dexter is thinking: What if I were to share this with someone? What if I were to drop it like a fat bomb on a 12-step group or on some county-paid counselor or on a shrink, one of those big-money boys with the certificates on the wall?



In the morning, they eat breakfast together, and things seem normal enuf. They don't speak until Dexter's wife breaks the silence. "Don't be late for work," she says.

Dexter bolts from the table still chewing his last bite of toast, his tip-proof coffee mug in one hand, the other grabbing at things as he rushes for the door – a briefcase, perhaps, a hat or an umbrella. His wife trails along.

"Pick up the dry cleaning," she murmurs. "Deposit the check. Call if you're working late." A peck of a kiss at the door and he's gone.

She stares at the closed door until she hears the car drive away, then she goes straight to the couch. Sits there. Turns on the TV with the remote. Turns it off again. The dog gets up, stretches, pads over to her. Absently, she scratches his ear. This is their secret moment. Intimacy, crammed into a nutshell.

Out on the freeway, Dexter works his way into the fast lane and gives it the gas. He's doing ninety with the radio blaring, stone-faced.



In the break room at ten, the new girl tells a joke about legless Eskimos in a meat-packing freezer. Dexter laughs so hard his jaws hurt, and the memory of dancing on pillows grows dim. Perhaps there is no problem. Perhaps life is good. Perhaps he is happy.

At five o'clock sharp he walks out of the office and drives straight into gridlock. He loosens his tie, turns up the music, smokes. He closes his eyes, and he's dancing again. Back home, his wife is still on the couch. The dog's bladder is bursting. Another day is rapidly coming to an end.

Ogre & Fleas

SEAN BRENDAN-BROWN

The reclining nude stays dead in the artist's studio
on a turn-of-the-century leather fainting couch
beautifully with one blue forearm covering
her breasts. Fleas

drop from her hair fat & black but otherwise
like dandelion seeds. The poodle catches them
and moans through a long scratch, tags jangling
then drags his rump

across six feet of Persian for good measure.
There's god again – chalk-striped in Florsheim
wingtips – back, god, there's no room for future
expansion. An ogre,

exhausted by humanity, caresses its own heart
exposed by a saber's light brush. The knight
could go no farther and hid, shivering,
inside a hollow oak.

The ogre, cheerful and sated, mud-poultices
its heart then builds an apple-branch bonfire
for pig-smoking and dancing. The knight, never
believing in dragons,

illogically extended this skepticism to ogres. He
trembles in his hollow so vigorously it sounds
like a can kicked over & over. His hair's expired,
this knight insufficiently

clandestine. "Little more than a tin morsel," the ogre
murmurs, cracking branches. "& fleas, no doubt."

Good Friday

ALAN CATLIN

Maybe he was just another cruel joke by God on the world left over from a bad experiment involving full moons, hallucinogens and an alcohol psychoses. Laughing at inner jokes made him a stand up comedian performing live in a Twilight Zone of his own creation. Expounding from his personal size Book of Paul was Show and Tell time for the Happy Hour audience of impenitents. Confiscating his beer, draws a reaction he equates with the wrath of God:

“What’s your problem?”

“I’m tired of watching your version of Laugh-In, it was old years ago.”

“I’m not finished with that beer.”

“If you want it, you’re going to have to swim down a drainpipe to Menands. It’s a long haul and it smells like hell down there.”

“You’re messing with God.”

“I don’t think God has ever been to Menands, I’m sure he wouldn’t like it much, Menands is the antithesis of the Garden of Eden.”

“I know the Angel of Death, personal, you’re doomed, now. I’ll see you dead.”

“Try squinting out of the other eye for a change, maybe you’ll get lucky and catch me in a frozen frame.

Let’s try a new subject now, like watching you leave.”

“I’m Jesse James, I’ll come back and rob you.”

“That’s okay, my name’s Bob Ford, if you’re up on history, you’ll back out that door.”

He was fairly well read for a psychotic, knowing what that meant, usually they just throw things and get taken away to the Psychiatric Center for a fun weekend of observation. If parting squints could kill, I’d be a dead man behind the bar but they don’t, yet.

things they weren't supposed to say around us

CARL MILLER DANIELS

when i was a patient in a mental hospital,
i heard one orderly saying to another orderly (about
yet another orderly):

“no, he’s not coming in tonight. he called in
and said there’s gonna be thunderstorms all night tonight,
and he said he loves to fuck during thunderstorms,
so he’s just gonna stay home tonight and fuck his
wife all night long.”

i later heard somebody in authority at the hospital
say (was it my psychologist? my psychiatrist? this
was a long time ago, and i’m fuzzy on certain
details): “orderlies are not supposed to use
certain kinds of language in front of the patients,
language that could upset them or stir them up,
especially sexual kinds of language when so
many patients have sexual kinds of hang-ups”

several of us patients heard the orderly talking
to the other orderly about the orderly who wasn’t
gonna come in that night ‘cause he wanted to
stay home and fuck his wife during the thunderstorms.
we chuckled, grinned knowingly, just grinned.

there were lots of thunderstorms that night, as i recall,
“some guy is fucking his wife all night long, tonight,”
i thought. i myself had never fucked. and thought
i never would. again, this was a long time
ago (over 20 yrs) but as i recall
i went to my bed near a huge wire-covered window
sad, confused, perplexed,
totally out of it, depressed and suicidal as usual –
the thunderstorms that night were loud
and, as i recall, fraught with shades
of sex made real.

Two Veterans Meet

DENWORTHY

In a Do-Nut shop,
a hairy biker
about fifty,
stares wide-eyed
at the Vietnamese
immigrant behind
the counter then
finally speaks
“I thought I killed you”
Counter man returns
wild eyed stare

“I think I kill you too...one seventy-three please”

Joe L. Brown

DENWORTHY

We threw watermelons ten or fifteen feet in an upward arc, and down into the seeder which looked like an old wooden wagon with high walls. I was seventeen and working the field my grandpa Brown once owned when Jake Sanders, the old man who bought it from him, told me the story of how my uncle Joe L. Brown, the uncle I was named for, had committed suicide beneath the very same tree we stood beside.

I couldn't say anything, just listen as he unfolded his story like a damp handkerchief of how Robert Dodson, who'd someday marry my aunt Nell, had shot something up in that tree and leaned his shotgun against its trunk to climb after it. Joe L. Brown, then seventeen like me, who was afflicted as a child by some fever and had failed to "enter manhood" as he put it, had attempted suicide before. As the old man told me how Joe put the gun under his chin, while my uncle Robert watched helpless from a branch just ten feet above, I sort of blocked out what he was saying. I got the same feeling I had when I was ten and my cousin, also ten, had pulled out the bottom half of her swimsuit and showed me that she'd begun growing pubic hair.

A feeling rose from my stomach and into my chest which affected my breathing as well as my speech and reasoning process; I gawked in wide-mouthed fascination at the twenty-or-so short little hairs. Both times I'd been speechless for surely if I wasn't I'd have asked some of the questions that raced through my mind. But I remained silent. I'd always been told that he was killed going through the fence with that shotgun, that he'd been hunting alone, no mention had ever been made of suicide or mental infirmity. I didn't tell that horrible story to anyone.

Twenty years later and in my own house I lay across my bed trying to nap off a headache while that very same cousin brought her children over to swim in my pool. She came into my bedroom and shut the door. Thinking I was asleep, she began to change into her own suit and as she did I saw that those twenty tiny hairs had grown into this tremendous part of her anatomy that now dominated her thin frame, reflected sunlight in reddish-brown glimmers and appeared as if she had blow dried it and brushed it outward. I knew that three children had sprang from it since then and that she'd named the first one, born three years before she married, for me. She named him Joe, not Joseph, because she said she wanted to think of someone she loved and not his father when she called out to him. I never told her thank you for that.

As she bent to pull up the bottom half of her suit I could tell she not only saw that I was awake but that my eyes were red and full of tears. Without speaking she pulled it up, walked over to my bed, and sat on the edge facing me but before she sat I crossed my arm over my forehead to block the light. She sat there a minute then asked "What is it?" Right then I wanted to tell her that everything was falling apart, that I hadn't worked two weeks in the last two months, that I couldn't stop doing the speed I'd started doing when there was plenty of work and that I couldn't make my house payment much less the pickup.

But I didn't say any of that. Instead as she tied the top of her suit behind her neck I could hear myself spilling out Jake Sanders' story. She listened while I told her that I'd been named for Joe L. Brown; that he was a mental case who never went into manhood, whatever

the hell that meant, his existence had been so unbearable that he'd been compelled to end it himself. And that right now more than ever before I felt the weight of that awful name.

She looked at me thoughtfully, then stretched thin arms behind her to hook the back of her bathing suit top, took my left fingers in hers and sort of pointed at me with her right and said, "You know... I started to tell you that when we were ten... for the life of me I don't know why I didn't!"



PAINTING BY ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

Onto a Maplewood Floor

JIM DEWITT

hard-smacking, the big ball simply would not
stop bouncing...somebody had jammed
its Basic Gravity Forcefield Frequency
with non-static interference

BANG BANG BANG BANG

fact is, it began bounding evermore harder
with louderwhacks creating its own
Dolby Noise Increase Factor accelerating so that
everybody began rushing to get their
Airport Issue For Silence muffs
to deaden the ear-din

BANG BANG BANG BANG

it had become Visualactive Perpetual Motion
fortunately confined to this one huge room
which was now sealed off isolated quarantined
as with Disease Prevention Measures
till a swat team could be brought in to sharpshoot
it down with overkill, just as cops do
to a flashbacking Vietvet
gone temporarily berserk

BANG BANG BANG BANG

so steady a rhythm this ricocheting ball made
was quite liable to spawn a brandnew
raprock craze if allowed to go on indefinitely
an infectiousness getting far into the gut
of a Hyper Primitive Savage beat...

BANG BANG BANG BANG

Stained Glass

GREG FITZSIMMONS

The breakfast-nook in our kitchen was like a restaurant with green vinyl-covered cushioning curving around a formica table top. I don't remember a breakfast ever being served there after my parents' divorce, except for once when our mother in the mental hospital on Easter and our dad took care of us and gathered us there in the morning and gave us (us being my two sisters and I) colored eggs and baskets filled with green plastic grass and hard candy. But that memory is an out-of-focus and uncentered photo only the most sentimental slob in the world would put in a scrap book and later stare at after the tape holding it down had turned yellow and begun to take off.

My souvenirs of the breakfast-nook come from ten years later when I would read there after everyone else had gone to sleep. I ate Philip K. Dick and William S. Burroughs novels like they were movie-theater popcorn and drank red wine while Louis-Ferdinand Celine explained to me the big bitter world I'd soon have to enter. Those books were like drugs; I didn't need the booze or the marijuana I occasionally smoked but sometimes they pushed me one step further where I was inside the Interzone or fevered with malaria and being brought out of the jungle on a litter carried by natives whose language was as incomprehensible to me as the muted grey, green, and blue pattern on the formica table top on which my adventures rested and which was exposed every time I lifted the book and turned a page to see what would happen next.

Earlier in the evenings, we often drank beer and Southern Comfort and Kool-Aid at the nook and made faces at each other and at our friends and had bad-reputation-carrying neighbors explain to us how to make over an aspirin bottle into a pipe or how to break open a capsule of speed or a look-alike drug and pour the powdery contents into an Old Style can (a combination of up and down that was too self-contradictory for me but my younger sister liked it, until Nancy Reagan started doing TV spots and Maria switched to plain beer and straight Southern Comfort and drank it in small sips while telling us we were wasting our lives on drugs). My mother was in the hospital a third of the time, and during that third no one was around to tell us we shouldn't be doing these things, except for our grandmother, who lived next door and was too old to recognize the extent of our '80s-style precocious vices and only complained about our friends, who were easy enough to sneak in and out.

One of those friends, Amelia, lived with us while her parents didn't like her new boyfriend. Amelia's presence was hard to hide, but our grandmother understood her story in a much more dramatic way than we ever could and allowed her to stay anyway. Pity was at the core of our grandmother's decision, but around it raged a confusion that expressed itself in the use of insulting phrases like "no-good slut", "street tramp", and "looking like a whore" in place of the girl's name. These insults were often accompanied by spastically hostile gestures and interspersed with foreign commentary on Amelia's appearance that none of us could understand or find in the Italian-English dictionary in the livingroom bookcase but that were probably the worse things you could possibly say or sign to someone on Taylor Street in the 1930s. Still, she never even suggested Amelia move back to her parents' (who never even called to check on their daughter) because anyone who'd kick a child out of their house was a less-than-human monstrosity in our grandmother's eyes.

One evening the four of us sat around the nook drinking Coca-Cola from long bottles - no booze because we had school in the morning and it was only early October so there were still a lot of interesting reasons to get out of bed that had nothing to do with what

the teachers had to say and everything to do with the new social configurations of a new school year.

Maria put the lip of a half-finished Coke bottle in between her own lip-glossed lips and tilted it way back, slowly sucking out a gulp. A tan foam formed like a lace doily on the brown surface underneath the air at the bottom of the upside-down bottle only to be quickly swished away when she tilted the drink right way again and set it on the table.

Amelia (who was sitting across from me) said: "God Maria! Why don't you use a glass? It looks like your sticking a guy's cock in your mouth."

"Yuch." My younger sister made a face that said she would never do a thing like that.

My older sister asked, "How can you even think of a thing like that?"

I said nothing; but it occurred to me that if she could think a thought like that than she was also capable of doing it. (You'll have to excuse me here because I was young and hadn't yet found out about T.S. Eliot's *Shadow*: at this point in my life the distance between a thought and its action was lit up like a stained-glass window in late afternoon when the sun nearing the horizon shoots straight through the glass and fills the interior of a church with the bright spiritual color of a life beyond the present moment.) Perhaps she'd even done it before. She now no longer seemed as young or as naive as I'd thought.

She liked to walk around wearing a towel, trying to pretend it was no big deal, and sometimes sitting in the living room with me and watching TV while pretending to wait for her hair to dry before getting dressed. I would pretend I wasn't looking at her naked shoulders and the wet little strands of hair that stuck to the back of her neck while she leaned forward to bum a cigarette from my pack on the coffee-table. Sometimes, she would exclaim along with the screen in a shrieking voice that would catch anybody's attention and cause them to turn her way. I let her think she was too young for me (only a year) so I'd continue to have the opportunity of seeing her in towel. I was even able to partially convince myself that my new freshman sights in high school rendered her eighth-grader's small breasts, delicate shoulders, and bony hips a nothing in my list of attractions. "If only her lips were fuller, her legs thicker..." I'd sigh while picking a subject for contemplation during masturbation. And I'd think of an older girl who had never even noticed me other than to giggle at the Punk she passed in the hallway or to smile within the smug amusement I'd added to her otherwise dull cheerleader's day.

In truth, Amelia looked like a fragile flower I wanted desperately to hold and my thoughts always turned her way just before I came in my hand.

Between us was a first step towards love that was forming itself in an awkward, too-young-to-know way: she acted like a hostile brat; I teased and treated her like she was an idiot; we both had an infantile attitude towards sex.

"What?" She asked my sisters, meaning she couldn't understand their disgust or their confusion. In demonstration, she held her Coke and pushed the neck of the bottle as far inside her red mouth as possible. Pulling it out without drinking, she pointed it at me. "See. I told you that's what it looks like. Look at Steve. He's blushing."

I gave her a mean look meaning "No I'm not. You're acting like a little brat again," and wondered if I was blushing. I turned away from her and stared at my drink, too afraid to take a sip because she might point at me and tell me I was sucking cock.

"I told you. See. I told you."

I could feel a hard-on coming on and knew I was blushing.

Amelia bent her head over her bottle, strands of her hair hanging over her eyes, and eased

her lips around the neck. She hummed, then took her mouth away and slightly giggled while brushing the strands out of her face.

“I’m getting out of here,” Lisa said.

Maria said something similar and I got off the bench to let them out.

“See. Look at Steve. He’s blushing,” Amelia told their departing backs.

When I sat back down in the booth I could hear my sisters close their bedroom door with a self-righteous definitiveness. But they’d taken their Cokes with them so they couldn’t have been too upset or disgusted.

I wanted to get back at Amelia for embarrassing me so I grinned across the table with what I thought was confidence and leaned over my own bottle while running the tip of my tongue around the mouth of it in what I thought was an imitation of cunnilingus. I imagined I was showing her a real porno scene. Looking up, “There, now you’re blushing,” I lied.

Her eyebrows serrated with bewilderment. “No I’m not. What’s that suppose to be anyway?”

I smiled, “You know.”

She stared at me as if trying to figure something out that had nothing to do with me or anything that had occurred previously; her brown eyes reflected the light in the ceiling; she bit her bottom lip, gently; then she took a casual sip from her bottle as if she’d forgotten her earlier comparison.

Somebody had once shown me a trick that I wanted to show her now to keep the subject alive. The trick was like a Stupid Human Trick you might have seen on David Letterman, except they would never put this one on TV. I was wondering more and more what she did with that boyfriend of hers her parents didn’t like. I never met him but he was a few years older and I figured anybody his age must do things I could only dream and read about. (I hadn’t ever even kissed or been kissed.)

I got up and went to my bedroom, returning to the nook a minute later with a fresh pack of Marlboros. My cigarettes went along with my pot and the Louis-Ferdinand Celine-like attitude I showed to my teachers. (While one dangled and fumed at the corner of my mouth, I stood in front of the high school. Adults passed by my leaning form and probably thought of greasers and other American delinquents. But I thought of myself as someone with a real reason to feel alienated, like a World War I vet who had seen all his friends killed and had been lost many nights in No Man’s Land and had seen his division officer reduced to two dislocated arms separated from an atomized torso, his hands reaching endlessly towards the sky, and an empty pedestal of hips and legs that stood teetering for a few seconds before falling over in the road; later I found his head in a ditch and talked to dirt-filled blind eyes and mute lips. “Well, old buddy, it had to happen to one of us eventually. And I’m glad you made the sacrifice. Don’t know how I’ll pay you back, though. But when - or maybe if - the good times ever come again, I’ll always think of you while enjoying myself.” And I gave it a football player’s kick into the woods; then I just kept walking and walking down the road and walking until I reached Paris where no one could ever find me or accuse me of desertion because I had become Lost, even to myself; if I couldn’t find myself, how could anyone ever find me? And the teachers and the dean would walk by and wonder why I had such a bad attitude; I’d squint and pretend I was invisible and Lost, dropping the butt and grinding it into the suburban sidewalk to show them how much they could never know true happiness because they had never known the true unhappiness that’s at the center of it.) Smoking also went along with the inarticulate routine of my relationship with Amelia and was something we could tenderly share while pretending we didn’t care for each other. She only smoked (anything) when she was with me (once she had told me this and coyly accused me of corrupting her) and

was always bumming a butt from me or asking for a hit off a joint; then we could bicker and toss gibes back and forth as if we hated each other within our surrounding cloud of second-hand tenderness that no one else entered.

I tore a filter off the end of a Marlboro and peeled away the tan-speckled brown paper, exposing the white fibers underneath so that it looked like a miniature fresh tampon.

“Give me your hand,” I said sitting down next to her and explaining that I wanted to show her a trick.

With the same innocently vacant expression she’d used to stare at me a minute earlier, she held her hand out. With the male counterpart of her expression, I leaned over and ripped the naked filter into tiny pieces, tearing it apart lengthwise like shucking corn, and put it on her palm (half the size of my own and pink like it was blushing, but her face still showed no emotion).

“Now what?” she asked, studying the white fibers like she was Jack with his Magic Beans and waiting, waiting, waiting every second for a miracle.

I wrapped my hand around hers, closing both in a double-layered fist, and said, “Squeeze tight.”

She did.

Turning her fist over so that the circle of her forefinger and the squiggle of her bent thumb were on top, I reached for my Coke. A few drops went through the circle and into her hand. “Stay holding tight.” And I wrapped my fist around hers again, putting it around the bottom this time so nothing could drip out onto the table.

“Yuch. What kinda trick is this? What’s gonna happen?”

“You’ll see.” (I felt so worldly at that moment.)

A little more fizzy Coke and I was done with the libations.

“Now, squeeze really tight, as tight as you can,” I said.

She did.

I told her to look me in the eyes and make the tightest fist she could. She had never looked at me so intently and I really enjoyed it. Thirty seconds later I let her open her hand. Spread across her palm was a thick white substance from the acid-dissolved filter, and strands of the milky goo arched between her open fingers like liquidy cobwebs.

“What’s this supposed to be?” She wasn’t disgusted but confused and stared at her palm like Jack again. (Only this time it was Jack after the Beans had sprouted and a vine poked up over the house and into the clouds and he wasn’t sure yet what he was supposed to do next.)

If she knew how to imitate fellatio (She’d looked exactly like the pictures I’d seen in magazines) then she should have known what come looked like. But, for some reason, she didn’t recognize the realistic facsimile I’d created. “Don’t you know?”

“No. Tell me.”

“Well, if you don’t know...” I laughed. I hadn’t found out exactly how much she knew about sex, but I could guess that she probably knew little. Somewhat disappointed, I consoled myself with the thought that I knew more than she did, and suddenly, momentarily, I felt so much more mature because for the first time in three years (ever since I’d grown a real bush of pubes and begun jagg-ing-off) I didn’t feel intimidated by a girl.

The trick or joke was that after you have the person open their fist, you're supposed to say, "Do you always come in your hand when you see my face?" But there was no point in saying the punch line if she didn't recognize the stuff.

I took her by the hand and led her to the sink.

"But what's it suppose to be?"

The faucet gushed into her blushing palm (whose blush seemed to indicate it knew what she didn't) and washed away the "come". I used my fingers to loosen the slime in the small webbing between her fingers and in the creases around her clear-bright nails.

"You don't want to know." (I now felt silly, no longer worldly.)

"I do. Tell me. --Steve!"

I could feel her wriggling against my side. The skin on our arms touched and I imagined their microscopic textures must have fitted together perfectly, like a jigsaw puzzle, the empty places in my epidermis being filled with the tiny raised parts of hers. It was invisible and warm and very close.

My hard-on was coming on again.

"Tell me what it is."

I dried her hand with the dish towel.

"Please."

She pressed closer, her jeans hip brushing against my jeans fly, and almost whispered, "Please tell me."

(This is what I would like to be able to write, if I wasn't so addicted to making these stories follow the truth: "I put my arm around her and took her to my bedroom; I locked the door behind us; she smiled; we said nothing; then I unzipped my pants and she watched my hands fish out my penis; I looked at her and she blushed; I took her warm hand and placed it on my erection and repeated my earlier instructions to 'Hold tight.' When we were done, she said, 'Oh, that's what it's supposed to be.'" This story is probably pretty close to the fantasy I had later that evening. But the distance between reality and pornography is even more insurmountable than T.S. Eliot's Shadow.)

"Its supposed to be come," I said, laughing to emphasize that I knew more than she did and she could admire me if she wanted. I took a step away from her and waved my arm in a gesture of cool, nonchalant explanation (like it was no big deal). "You know..."

"Yuch. Who taught you that trick?"

I forgot what I said or who had taught me the trick or what happened next. But I'm sure she shook her head at how weird I was and went off to my sisters' room to hang out with them. I'm sure I went to my room and masturbated while thinking about her blushing palm.

Two weeks later she broke up with her boyfriend. She'd only seen him two or three times while she was living with us and things must have been far less serious with him than she'd thought. She immediately moved back to her parents' house and I rarely ever saw her after that.

This Meeting Place

JOHN GREY

He is more formal than you could imagine.
He says "Please" as he stretches out his hand.
A word I don't hear so often anymore
stops me in my tracks.
I trace it to its source,
a man of indeterminate age,
wrinkled up behind a thick grey beard.
"I'm a vet," he adds.
More a veteran of begging
than the shells in his ears by this,
I'm thinking.
For a moment, I actually consider
the benefits or otherwise
of my giving the man a buck,
whether he'll just race off
to the nearest bar,
flush his gangly, bent body
down a beer
or whether he really will put
the money towards his rehabilitation,
be a different man next time we meet,
maybe invite me into his
simple but neat apartment
with my dollar tacked to the wall
as a reminder of how
it all changed for him.
Then I turn my attention to myself.
What if I walk briskly by,
wallet zipped tighter than my lip?
Will I continue on this road to hell
I'm carving with my footsteps?
Or what if I toss a lousy dollar note his way?
Will my sudden beneficence
spark a change for the better in me?
It's a crossroads I'm sure
or, at least, it's a crossroads
I recognize as one,
with a price tag squirming
in his wretched palm.
"A buck you say," I reply,
though I know I never said it.
"Whatever you can afford," he smiles,
which is all he ever means.

A Woman Named Circles

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

Her father, an old hippie, named her thereby setting her on the path that was to become her life, seeking closure, trying to round things out in a world that was all angles, a world of straight lines converging, mingling. She tried to adapt but it made her crazy. Even her body was round, round and sleek and desirable and she used it to try and change the world into that full round entity that she envisioned but of course the world was too full of angles and she found herself used (in a circular fashion) then abandoned. And the years passed with her circling her way through life with nothing changed, nothing resolved. And still she circled on, older now and wiser but no more fulfilled than the day her father, stoned on reefer, baptized her with the remains of a quart can of Coors and sent her on her way. One day, old and discouraged, she was driving home on the newly-constructed loop that bordered the city when a big diesel cut in front of her, collapsing that little bundle of Japanese metal with her inside it right there on the loop, the concrete circle that death, in his mercy, had contrived and bestowed on her. The very last thing that her sight registered was a big red sign emphatically declaring WRONG WAY and then she was lifted to a place that was all circles, giant circles, glowing circles, revolving circles, all the colors of the rainbow, circles, circles and a lot of music.

June 19, 1994

What Ever Happened to Kitchens?

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

“I haven’t seen any of those people In years. Everybody I know has drifted away.”
–Old Plantation Restaurant habitue.

“So be their place of one estate
With ashes echoes and old wars–
Or ever we be of the night
Or we be lost among the stars.”
–Calverlys, by Edwin Arlington Robinson

Places people come to in the evening after work
to eat and drink coffee, then wander back later
with the dark coming in and the loneliness on them.
Day in and day out, that little core of regulars
meeting in clusters, each cluster aware of the others,
nodding to each other. And the waitress of many years
knowing just what to bring when someone sits down.
Weary with the day, they come, ready to mingle hopes and needs,
voices tinged with boredom, a furtiveness about them,
the furtiveness of one who has no place else to go.

“What ever happened to Kitchens?”

They find their places and they stay, year after year,
a new face appearing from time to time, an old one vanishing,
the loss absorbed slowly after endless discussion of
the manner of his going, his new estate;
the light in the room a quality of their lives, a condition
more familiar than the rooms to which they return
to fall exhausted across the rumpled bed and sleep
till morning draws a damp and cheerless hand across the drugged face.

“What ever happened to Kitchens? Where did he go?”

The one who left unannounced, the one who broke all the rules
and vanished without a word–
the brawler, the bruiser, the banger against lives,
who fought and cursed and spoke his mind and embarassed them
to a man,
who was ugly and graceless and knew all their flaws
and flung them in their faces and laughed at them
and was dragged out more than once drunk,
cursing the world and the cops and all of them individually
and returned unrepentant to their subdued midst
to continue as though he’d never left, haranguing, mocking them–
And then vanished one night with a wave and a curse to return no more,
black jacket flapping, bald head shining, beak-like nose
plowing through the darkness like a ship at sea, big Harley roaring.
“So long, Motherfuckers!”

The shadows of the room converge, the talk goes on.
The shadows listen and do not comment. The waitress
moves from table to table, filling salts and peppers, wiping
catsup lids.

Voices sound from the parking lot, shrill and despairing.
Lights flash against the window then vanish to the engine's roar.
They huddle closer in the close, still room.
The night grows. They are dreams without a dreamer.

"What ever happened to Kitchens?"

They slouch in their places, humble before his absence.
"He shouldn't have gone away like that. He should have said something!"
Lonely and dissatisfied, they talk desultorily, watching the clock.
"Somebody oughta call the shop and ask."
"Maybe he's there and don't want to be bothered."
"Maybe he's—" the word never comes out.
They crouch over their coffee cups; the shadows draw closer.
His absence as bulky and menacing as his presence—but less acceptable.
The waitress refills their cups automatically, her boredom a texture
of the space
like the shadows in the corner and the night that swirls in
with each opening of the door.

"Hell, he could write! He could send us a postcard here. They'd get
it to us!"

They sit on, later than usual. The talk turns to other things but no
one is fooled;

they're waiting.

They think of seasons past: Kitchens stomping in in the cold,
jacket zipped tight, gauntlet gloves encasing his forearms,
cursing the cold in his high, venomous voice;
or shirtsleeved and sweaty summers, bald head glistening, cursing the heat.
Now nothing.

The silence descends like a shroud. They smoke and wait,
gathering their courage, not meeting each other's eyes.
Finally, one stands, glancing furtively at the door.

"You leaving?"

He almost sits down again, then straightens, nods.

"Yeh, I gotta get an early start in the morning."

Another shifts uncomfortably, settles back, then rises slowly.

"Me too," he mumbles.

One by one, the others rise, stand hesitating,
then slowly, one by one, move down the aisle and out the door
to stand there in the night.

"I guess he's gone," one says.

"Yeh, he's gone."

"Gone without a word."

One by one, they move off down the street, heads bent,
a dread on them – of the night, of the silence,
of the musky rooms with their rumpled beds and the darkness.
One stops and stares upward, mouth agape.

"What happened to him?"

A car screams around the corner, then vanishes in a spray of light.

He stands a moment longer, then trudges on,
homeward beneath the clear, unanswering stars.

October 14, 1982

Trailblazer Trial and Error

DUSTY ERIK LUNDE

My father took me to the circus, taught me
to watch the acrobats, study the prowess, and appreciate
anything anybody learned, by whatever trial and error
no matter what trial and tribulation. No:
I'm making this up. I never had a father
nor a mother – not ever. Parthogenesis
was my solitary path, all on my own. My lonesome road
so dark at night, in many back alleys.

I was accused of acquired taste. J'accuse, who
me? I repent, America. Forgive me, mass media.
I know not what I do. We must all
disavow our learning, day after day...

Trying to be commercially viable
made me contractually liable
to become exceedingly pliable
on my higher principles. Moral judgement
quickly sacrificed, for a fast buck
or two – for a fee
beyond all legal limit
of reasonable human error.
What failure isn't profitable
in this day and age
of whining self-congratulation
and proud victimization, broadcast
on every television set across the nation.

Reality check
was lost in the mail, just blame the post office
of course. Hide your tracks, and cover your ass
as best you can. Accountability is a lost trail
best forgotten, anymore. Never mind duty
or responsibility, in a self-indulgent society.
It doesn't pay. Not well enough
anyway, amidst ill-bred crazed company
oblivious to the straitjacket restraint
of mere sanity. Where's the money
in protestant work ethic
in a godless, ungodly world?

The road to salvation is a forked path
obscured and confused
by a culture going around in circles
chasing its own tail. Don't worry
this is the end of the road anyway
with no possible exit and no last chance
for redemption. This wrong turn
is a one-way dead-end
stop
without any turn-around
escape...

christian schad: count st. genois d'anneaucourt, 1927

GERALD LOCKLIN

the viennese aristocrat
in tuxedo, black tie, and white handkerchief;
the women in transparent gowns,
one frontal, one dorsal,
one mature, one "a notorious transvestite."

the latter's butt lacks sensuality,
but look at the pert little breast
on the other – it might as well be naked,
yet it's even sexier this way.
how could anyone not cup it,
tweak it? i wish i'd run into a
tit like that today, but i won't.
for me the entire painting
including the chimneys of the city,
seen from the roof
exists for the flaunting of that tiny nipple.

the faces, severe, are unfortunate.

the man,
anticipating bogey,
but not really,
keeps his hands in his pockets.

honore daumier: rue transnonain, 15 april 1934

GERALD LOCKLIN

the father has rolled out of bed
and has landed on an infant who
is trying to crawl out from under him.
the muscled legs of the man
are bare, his nightshirt covering
his barrel torso.
are those bloodstains on the carpet
and the garments?
two others are also on their backs
on the floor: a wife and grandfather?

i don't know the story of this lithograph,
whether a political massacre or merely
a bloody crime has occurred. it could have
been either in those days, just as now.
i could look it up.

except that the horror is that
the violation has taken place in the home,
where one trusts in the safety of one's family.
thus our constitutional guarantees against
unreasonable search and seizure,
against the quartering of troops;
thus the requirement of warrants.

thus, the better part of a family's wealth
goes for safe housing,
to live in a "decent" neighborhood.

thus one does all possible,
within the limits of one's resources,
and yet the nightmare is
no guarantees are absolute.

Twenty-Five (an excerpt)

CHRIFTOR MAROVSK

555555555555555555

Greasy steps. Slippery steel. Cigarette butts. Ashes mixed with oil mixed with year-old bread crumbs mixed with dead skin and sweat and booze and ink and pulp and tears and screams and cum and piss and birdshit and every ooze a loafer, workboot, three-inch pump, slipper, or stiletto heel can carry on its chafed, gripping undersurface.

Greasy steps, twelve inches by three feet, grooved with eighth-inch wide, quarter-inch high spines meant to offer sure-footing. Spines worn and softened in certain spots where the footwear and footweight has chafed away the metal to someplace else. Those certain spots that are now slippery steel and—goddammit! Motherfucker! The sound of tearing grocery bag pulled against the body, desperately, as it slips away, bottom heavy. White knuckles slipping on the chipped and painted-over and chipped ten-color railing. The right hand gripping, back twisting, four toes holding the edge of that greasy, greasy step, left foot flailing for footing. That—goddammit! Motherfucker!—bag slips and dives end over end glass jars and denting cans smashing eggs gourmet noodles—fucking bastard!—bag of sugar and the flour. Cocksucker!

Rick held on, gained his balance and slunk down the stairwell. Nobody else lived in the warehouse so his outbursts went unheard. Four steps from the first, he kicked the broken glass to the corner at the bottom. He crouched down and mixed the white and powdery ingredients that weren't tainted with egg-spew together in the cheap, shabby, ripped supermarket bag, trying to keep them separated as they clung to their torn, feeble factory-sealed enclosures. The two pound bag of peanuts survived in their shells, and four canisters of lighter fluid were dented but intact. Noodles are indestructible. Tin-cans can survive a nuclear winter. Leaving behind the blood-like gooping mess of spaghetti sauce, he towed the remainder of his goods to the elevator at the top of the landing.

He spit on the wall as he waited for the carriage to arrive. Rick could not understand why the elevator was always at the top of the building when he came home. He always thought that machines were designed to follow the instructions of those who controlled them. The first time he noticed this flaw in mechanical reason was just after he had sent in his third rent check. He had returned to his building after a wickedly tight bender, fully expecting the accordion-like doors to be open. He imagined those doors, gaping widely, like his mother's arms, ready to hug him home. This was the vision that coaxed his mind to persuade his feet to stumble his body to the correct dark, brick-dense, anonymous abandoned warehouse. Instead, he found darkness and the empty hollow of the six-story shaft. The spun-steel cable hung before his eyes, swinging slightly, dangling to the chilling depths of the basement below. A slight glow emanated from the very base of the chasm. He liked that. Hypnotized by drink, depth, and dumbfoundedness, Rick looked around for a button he had never used before. The compartment had always been where he left it, top or bottom, doors open, just like he left them. Pointing his fingers into the outer pocket of his jacket, he pulled out a small blowtorch. He click-click-whooshed it on and peeked around in the misty blue-orange haze. He found the pressbutton and it cracked as he applied force to the blackened arrow. The upsign did not light up. The important thing, though, was that the gears spun and the cables followed their programmed path

and that—sonofabitchingoddam—boxcar of an elevator lowered smoothly to the first and a half floor.

Rick never entertained the idea that some creepy, insidious, demented mass-murderer could have been lying in wait for him. He didn't watch TV. His brain just did not work that way.

On this day, he was used to the wait. Rick snorted another boog down into his throat. His lips tossed the lunker down the chasm this time. Slow, slow, fucking slow. The compartment arrived and he set the tortured groceries down at his feet, punched the cock-like lever sticking out of the wall three times, and rose to his domain.

Remnants of the Pope of Pop, women dead or walking dead, greeted him with their silkscreeny stares. Images of soup cans, like the tin ones in his screamed-open bag, hanging from giant fish-snagging hooks, tilted in the breeze from his always open windows. Heat bulged from the vents in this place. Rick had a thing for Warhol. Anybody could recreate anything. The mundane was spectacle. But how does one create a signature? A name? How to innovate the inane.

Fire. Boredom since just shortly after its discovery. Taken for granted. Yet, so integral to our accustomed existence. Modified, categorized, contained. Extremities. Embers to induction. Heat. Flame. Fire. This common everyday expectancy. Heat for the house, burn from the sun, explosions within engines, warm soup, molten steel, and the sparkcrackhiss-shhhh of the disposable lighter. Fire.

A bed, simple and large, with crumpled sheets. Clothes on hangers, pulling away from the ceiling on a twining cable, taut enough to keep the weight off the floor across a thirty-foot expanse. An abandoned remodeling project of a kitchen in one corner. One hundred square feet of tile hugging another spot where the walls meet, with a water spout poking out of the wall and two knobs below it to control the flow.

Rick had three refrigerators. They were back-to-back making a triangle out of the inside. On the outer diameter, a door handle could be found every one-hundred-and-twenty degrees from the last in the circle created in the dead center of his rented space by the units which were plugged into the drop-cable which hung from his ceiling. One for food, another for beverage, and the last.

“FOOD” stood out in blowtorched stencil. “BEV” blackened the yellow-white of another oblong door. The third cooler remained blank. He thought about labeling it “supplies”, but that would be too obvious.

He chucked the food parcels from the bag and his arms to places where they belonged. Reaching into the “FOOD” holder, he grabbed out two donut-shaped dough rings, stuffing one cold bagel into his mouth and another in his pocket. He forgot to check any phone messages he might have had, and scurried toward the elevator to get back to the streets, to creep his way uptown. That night he had an important meeting. It was time to plan, something the spontaneous dominator that ruled his mind was not used to, but was, at the same time, quite good at.

The sonic, electronic, and mechanical vibrations of the stretching cables were transmitted through the soles of his boots as he was lowered to near-street-level. Toes tingling, Rick leapt down the greasy steps, evading the red spew of seasoned ketchup and sole-piercing shards of shattered jar. The crisp burn of night-air-wind tore at his eyelids as he wound out the door and beat a path to the subway hole. It was time to plan number twenty-five.

The Combine Congregation

THOMAS MICHAEL McDADE

Clete Strong's green pickup
had an oversized bed and a sign
on a window that said CLERGY
but he never quoted Scripture.
The Reverend coached a project
team named the Combines after
a semi-pro nine he remembered.
He boasted to our mothers
what good kids and ballplayers we were.
He was grateful for any kind of sandwich.
He had a temper, threatened a couple of umps
but left his Buck Knife on the bench.
Flashed it for a junk dealer though.
We'd filled the truck with riverbank rocks
the Reverend said were pig iron that
would sell for scrap to buy uniforms.
The dealer laughed and we hustled
our Reverend off a step ahead of the law.
Shit, project kids didn't need sissy uniforms.
It got worse. A lifeguard at the city pool
told our shortstop the Reverend wasn't
clergy which got back to him.
He wiped his face with a red bandana,
talked about his shotgun but calmed down
enough to go out sandwich hunting.
Twelve gauge is as real as his church
the centerfielder said and most of us
agreed but hell he was our coach.
Two barrels blazed away weapon doubt:
Reverend Strong settled a domestic spat:
gunned the boyfriend down,
claimed he saved the woman's life.
He did time and the wounds healed.
Really was a church, a storefront.
I wasn't as good a ballplayer as
the Reverend bragged to my mother for Spam.
But I did go two-for-three with
a game-saving catch once that summer.
And if one of the gang that returned
to the project after that win, cheering
in the big bed of the green pickup
were to dispute that performance today
I wouldn't pull a gun I'd swear
pig iron were gold for a chance to
compare our Combine Scripture.

Port City Transport

ERROL MILLER

The mystery of it,
the lush silence inside,
rolling along on ornamental
wheels turning ever Eastward.
A man doesn't tarry long beside
the amber running lights: however,
we are all moving at approximately
the same speed, we are all
buying and selling cucumbers and squash,
muscadines and ripe figs fresh from Dixie's
trash-strewn vineyard, vegetables, dug from dirt,
and flowers along for the ride. One feeble bulb
flickers along the firmament of the roadway.
The driver has a surreal scowl, like he's
been depressed for a long long time.
Soon sunset shall smash him
into a million tiny molecules that machines
can never ever fix, neither green life machines
nor breath machines or slot machines or any other
kind of pseudo-things made of chrome and shiny steel.
There are no secret chambers on this side of technology.
The pink and the grey, the lemon-scented screeching,
aluminum blocks and big Mercury cars streaming
through the night, they all have only
one destination, curving into
dawn like a cattle-car
void of tenants.

Pushcarts, shoved aside,
and diesel fumes and truckstops shrouded
in the early mist of morning, bleary-eyed outback
truckers drinking milk, not coffee, last night's buffet
left with only scrawny chicken wings, "to market,
to market, to buy a fat hen," perhaps some
roast beef and even link sausage made
from the residue of the carcass.

Already the Avenue is lined
with vehicles, waiting, waiting, waiting.
The weigh-stations are clogged, overflowing
with flamboyant truckers ripping off their cowboy shirts,
pleading for a cigarette, a cool drink of water, anything
to lessen the load: these are growing pains of violence,
mighty swords and plowshares and men exiled
from their Oklahoma farms. The sun's coming up,
the moon's nearly in menopause, who really notices
when a fine Omaha steak may be available just
across the county line. And there,
in a lopsided dusty truckstop
inhabited by derelict men
who stop to rest and eat, a Woman
with beer on her breath climbs the short steps
to each cab and examines the faces of the drivers:
she has brought a ton of trouble with her,
her lips moist, her tongue glistening,
her eyes lit up like an arcade pinball machine,
her clothes smelling of urine and curd cheese and whey.

Leafing through her notebook she has so many appointments
to keep, rounds to make, and the boney fingers of dawn
are already carving up the Eastern Seaboard, and some
of the men are cautiously slumbering, dreaming
of security, and the barren cottonfields
edge up to the banks of the River and pause
and soon the sun will beat down upon
crates of California melons and worthless Mexican trinkets
and marijuana smuggled through several border states
and some of the men are still rumsoaked
from last weekend and some of them
had a quarrel with their wives
and some have no wives
with which to share the fruit of their labors.
But today, between the icicle-shelves
of carrots and radishes and wooden cartons bulging meat,
between the lumpy bags of Idaho potatoes and Washington apples,
a man will unfold his brand-new newspaper and prepare
to take his first sip of black coffee.
He'll gulp and read his name,
and his lips will quiver
as the wormwood arrow finds its mark,
and the engine, once idling, begins to race
faster and faster, and gears grind and the battery
is charging and all systems are on go and he
pulls out on a highway where
weeds clog the medians and the exits are boarded up
and the roadsigns are blank and there
is not much traffic, like taking old U.S. 80
through the middle of Mississippi, and there's a big
moon going down and the light of day
is supposed to be brighter, maybe those
damn pills, or stomach problems,
and the driver of the rig
finds his crates are empty and his ice
has melted and his red roses have withered
and he's hoarse from breathing hard, he jerks
off his dark glasses and examines the remainder
of things breaking up, passing one of the Fishhouses
he remembers a delivery he made there back in '69
of spoiled merchandise, and his crew cut
is about gone and he longs for even
a cheap motel room and a shot
or two of whiskey, and his blood is cooling
and the earth is whizzing by uninhabited
as if he were in a TV Stone-Age time-warp
running out of fuel. Unfolding his tattered map
there are no familiar markings, and the landscape's
just a blue-grey blur, and not even the dilapidated barns
are marked with advertising and the radio's silent
and the CB will not incessantly chatter
and every store seems to be closed.
Reaching for a cigarette, he fumbles
with his lighter, grimaces,
remembering a mess of fresh perch
caught up at D'Arbonne Lake, remembering Sasha
and the kids and the clacking of lonesome freights
on lonesome rails and the wail, lately,
late at night, of the whistle, as it
just disappeared around
the bend.

Animal Play

B.Z. NIDITCH

Scene I: In Dr. Mammalian's New York Office.

[Dr. Mammalian awaits his first appointment. Around his office are animal pictures of every species, intermixed with naturism of the human variety. Princess Annette D'Carlo is overdressed with jewels and a feather boa.]

ANNETTE: Oh, Dr. Mammalian, what an honor to see you. I know you are a busy man but I've read all your books and I believe your theory that we poor humans are basically animals. I know it's true and I know besides the Creator and Darwin you will find your place among the kings of our jungle.

DR. M.: And to whom do I owe this privilege and honor?

ANNETTE: The Princess Annette d'Carlo.

DR. M.: Oh, Princess, I saw your name on the society pages. Weren't you engaged to the Duke of Puerilistan?

ANNETTE: Well, actually, the Duke and I weren't compatible. After he read your book he realized he was a giraffe, and I made the discovery that I was a lioness.

DR. M.: So you evaluated yourself even before seeing me? You see how self-help books are changing our world? From Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book to Dr. Mammalian's All Animal.

ANNETTE: How difficult it was to get an appointment.

DR. M.: But Princess, when I heard your voice on the answering service –

ANNETTE: Was it my roar?

DR. M.: Well, you weren't exactly purring.

ANNETTE: I was mad as any alley cat – that's what my sister is. The Princess Cleve – remember her? She was diagnosed last year as a cat and decided to seek a sex change operation rather than remain a woman. Now she is a drag king at the Palace.

DR. M.: I have so many patients – but where exactly is the Palace?

ANNETTE: (in a low voice) Las Vegas, honey. Oh, I mean Las Vega in Venezuela...

DR. M.: I try to be patient and I hope you realize how expensive a visit to me is.

ANNETTE: Oh, I'd give you my life, short as it is, Dr. Mammalian.

DR. M.: What's wrong, my dear?

ANNETTE: Oh, we lionesses have problems with overprotection and I've had eleven lovers just this mating season. The poor cubs; some were confused about when we were to get together. I usually go with lions yet all they want to do is sit around, eat and have sex. And I used to think they were the king of the jungle. We lionesses have so much more to give...

DR. M.: Precisely, Princess. So if you have self-diagnosed, how come you have come here?

ANNETTE: Well, it's not for myself, but for one of my cubs, Jake. He's waiting outside, but he's outside.

DR. M.: Let Jake in. I'm sure I can make a killing with him. But this will cost you double.

ANNETTE: No problem, Doctor. I'm loaded, and I told you, honey, I'm from the Palace.

DR. M.: Of course, my Princess. You are attractive.

ANNETTE: I used to be a guy.

DR. M.: No matter. You're a real lioness now. Go and let in Jake.

(Enter Jake)

ANNETTE: Jake is so demure.

DR. M.: Jake – let's get down to business.

JAKE: That's what all the guys and girls say at the Palace. Shall I undress here?

DR. M.: I'm not a medical doctor.

JAKE: Whatever. I know you are an animal too. I've read your book.

DR. M.: Well, if you'd like an exterminator. We can do that after some queries. What's your problem?

JAKE: After reading your book I realized I was a bug. I had all the symptoms; I hated myself. I went to every self-help group – AA, NA, SA – that's Sex Anonymous – and I read every pop psychology book I could find and still I realized I was only a bug. I've come here for a transplant.

ANNETTE: Do you do them, Doctor?

DR. M.: Of course. I'm a hypnotic specialist.

ANNETTE: Oh, thank God. I knew Dr. Mammalian would not fail us.

DR. M.: So after you both undress for me I will hypnotize you and you will be a recovered bug. Which animal do you wish to be?

JAKE: I wish to be a wolf – a ravishing wolf. I think in another life I was. My last name in the natural world is feral – Jake Ferrell.

DR. M.: Well, we will make you into a wolf – after we all undress. I'd like to take part in this animal play as well.

ANNETTE: I brought along a little strip music that Jake and I use in our act outside the Place, in a place called Queens.

DR. M.: Sounds so regal.

ANNETTE: We think it's a place to let your hair down and for a lioness like me, it's so easy.

(Annette plays the music and they all strip to the waist.)

DR. M.: (to Jake) Watch my third finger...I'm holding up...you are not a bug. You are a... wolf. Repeat after me. I am a wolf...I am a wolf...that's it.

JAKE: I am a wolf. I am a wolf...

Custody

BEN OHMART

The Godfather was sitting pretty deeply in the back, not wanting to know anyone, especially the stars.

To him, the child looked golden. There was no silver medal. Just the one child, and the Judge was being sweet. The kid had the gavel to play with, the video game in his too small hand had been muted, and soon the court wasn't concerned with the clicking of the buttons. It kept one young mind off matters.

Mother had much to say, but she had no grounds for that which the father accused. Threats on both sides, usually for the offspring's sake, but never a promise that couldn't be kept. The Judge did a lot of grand watch looking, but still they continued. There were too many valid points. And the Judge wasn't up to sentencing just yet. A tough call.

It was a few minutes later. The Judge thought there was something wrong. What was it? Then he looked. The child was gone. And there was no clicking.

The case recessed. Everyone who didn't care before now cried and cared about the child, and the cops were off on a hall hunt. Nothing. It kept up for a while, a local guard calling it in, though in theory there was nothing to be done, even with a Judge as a witness. The child had only been gone a half hour now.

The Godfather talked to the child as an adult. The game was still going in the small hands, so it didn't matter. And by the time he got the kid to the new place, just leased that morning, the hot dogs and chili in the pan were steaming just as planned. The child launched into it. His favorite. The man knew.

Hours went by, and the game's batteries were giving up. The Godfather put in a fresh pair. Always looking out for him. The child smiled. It was all worth it.

The next morning the man went out for supplies. He had plenty, but he could never have too much. Besides, the papers would be out. And something like this. Bound to be a popular story.

He reached for the paper. What were...they... doing about it....? He scanned the paper. It was all the way on page three. Too many important things had happened that day. Still, page three.

The Godfather smiled. They had no leads. The parents were worried sick. Good. He went into the local market. Now was the time to buy hair dye for the child. He needed a last look to make sure the child's hair was as fine as he'd remembered. Yes. And then some applesauce. Cheese crackers. The good kind. Fine.

He went to the cold stuff and made sure the butter was fresh. Never enough butter. Then to the rumbling beverage dispensers. He opened the door, and held his hand on the milk before remembering. No. He had to get off the milk. He'd already planned for that. But still, his hand went automatically to it. No. No milk. The child wouldn't be on there yet. But he simply had to break the habit.

Letting Dog Go

DONALD RAYMOND POLLOCK

I'm walking Dog, and he's claiming new territory all over 4th Street when some beanpole guy with fried eyes and little tattoos that don't quite fit his body lurches out of the weeds over by the welfare apartments. He hunkers down to pet Dog, and, Bill, his hands are covered with some green shitty stuff, and, man, I just gave Dog a bath. I say, "Hey, Skinny, you all right?" He's staring deep into Dog's eyes like he's some kind of psychic or something and doesn't answer; and ol' Dog's getting antsy, and I don't want him biting this guy because we just settled that lawsuit with the Cahill kid.

So I start pulling Dog away, and Beanpole jumps straight up in the air like this and says in this high, wobbly voice, "Mister, that dog is marked just like they showed me, but I know what to do. They taught me everything. Mister, this world's a bad, bad place, but when we go, it don't mean we got to sleep together." Bill, this kind of shit happens all the time because we got the VA Hospital, and I figure he's just some loony coming off the thorazine. That last crack though, the one about sleeping together, got Dog all tore up, and we take off.

Then, when I turn around to make sure the fruitcake's not trailing us with some more of his dirty sex stuff, I see him start twirling in the street like some goddamn giant top; and he's flopping this way and that, waving those stick arms like a windmill; and, get this, he's humming some kind of scary circus music and puking black grit at the same time. Now ol' Skinny's spinning faster and faster, until the tats become one bony picture of another world, and the dust all around him is glowing in the sunlight coming over the radio towers; and, Jesus Christ, Bill, everything, I mean every goddamn thing, starts to move towards that beanpole bastard. Clouds are spitting birds, car doors are flying, trees are slinging branches; and, Bill, I swear I didn't know what to do. Goddamn, it was him or me; Jesus Lord, it makes me sick to think about it; I let him go...I let Dog go.

A Day in the Life

LON SCHNEIDER

He walked into the house of wax. It was empty except for the cars. All of the salesmen were at a meeting. They were watching a film. A voice was talking about paint. He took a seat by the front window and watched the traffic. He wondered how many cars there were. All the new ones looked pretty much the same. They had different names, but they looked pretty much the same. It was no accident. It was simply a lack of imagination. A clear case of monkey see, monkey do.

He heard a commotion in the hall. The meeting was breaking up. The salesmen returned to their offices which were recesses in the back wall. He walked up to a salesman and said he wanted a red car. The salesman said he had one red car and showed him a picture of a green car. He wondered if the salesman was color-blind. He asked how much the car would cost. Forty-nine dollars, said the salesman. That's if you make a down payment today to secure the car. Otherwise someone else could buy it. It will be here in three weeks. He wrote a check for forty dollars and said he'd pay the balance when he picked up the car. I'm sorry, said the salesman but there's no way we can sell you that car for forty-nine dollars. It's going to be more like forty-nine thousand dollars. Because it's red. We subtract the forty dollars you've already paid and that leaves a balance of 48,960. We'll also deduct your trade-in, of course. I just need your keys. The salesman took the keys and drove his car into a lake. He came back and said, I'm sorry but your car is worth nothing. Your balance remains 48,960. He didn't know where he would come up with that kind of money so he asked for his keys and his check back. Certainly, said the salesman. The customer is always right. He returned the check and keys and said you will find your car at the bottom of the lake. It was an accident.

He walked home and thought he should call a lawyer, but since he didn't have a lawyer he called his uncle who was an accountant. The line was busy so he decided to walk over to the office. He took the stairs to the second floor. But on the door where the office should be was a sign that said Triffid Corporation. He saw a movie once called Day of the Triffids. He wondered if there was a connection. He had a bad taste in his mouth. Sort of like bitter cotton. He walked down the corridor in search of a water fountain. A woman emerged from an office and he asked her if she knew his uncle. No, she said, and the water fountain is out of order.

He realized he was in the wrong building. It was an easy mistake to make because all of the buildings looked alike. Except, of course, for the house of wax. He walked over to the building next door and took the stairs to the second floor. But the door on the landing was locked. He hoped the entrance door hadn't locked. If so he'd be trapped in the stairwell. Fortunately the door opened and he stepped into the bright sunlight.

Some Lessons Are Worth the End of the

MARK SENKUS

I bumped into him
in the john
a man born without
testicles
and he told me
the truth about
women
from an objective
view
where their short skirts
went unnoticed
and their voices
only fell like another
rainy day

and I learned of
the importance of
beetles and
the necessary beauty of
an after-shock in
southern california

and I learned of the reason
seasons changed
and the reason a pig
prefers mud
to humans

I sat at the end
of the bar
but had the bartender
walk down
to him
and give him the
drink
I bought
and we smiled across
the full room
of another night
until the walls
caved in
and all the people
screamed...

we went on
smiling.

Remembering Detroit from a Long Ways

MARK SENKUS

it was winter
and the killing was going
on as usual
downtown Detroit
living in cheap apartment after
getting thrown out
of rented upstairs room from
nice landlady afraid
I was making her slum-palace-home
look like a flop or crack
house bringing
my red-haired girl
in and out day and night
for her to love me on the bed next
to my electric hot-plate.
we were as quiet as we
could be and considerate
but the coming and going
at all hours was making the
landlady look bad to the
neighbors so then
it was into a fifth floor
cave just off Woodward Ave.
cockroaches and gunshot-thunder
my only companions...the
redhead left me for someone
with more money and less
difficulty with life

used to sit there with seven dead
roaches at the window sill watching
ambulances scream and
wondering "who, what, when, where,
and why?" at their fate.
finally stopped wondering when it all
seemed the same

brother coming to visit
witnessing gunplay
just off the front steps
of the building
"don't look" I whispered
"just walk to the car"
once inside and driving past
the Cass Ave. hookers
running reds to get a head-start
on everything,
he asked "need some money?"
and then responded "for a gun" when I
asked him "what for?"
no I didn't need money for a gun
but I WAS a bit short on the rent

other nights stepping down dark
streets daring myself to look brave
to be brave and keep walking,
explore the neighborhood,

watching poor black man (even the poor need
warmth) get thrown out of Orchestral
Hall lobby by a less poor black doorman.
I practically stepped over him as
he slowly lifted himself from the
cold of the concrete looking
at me with all
the hatred of being him
and being poor

remembering some good
times too
being the only white boy
in a bar but
having "friends" there
looking out for me and
ladies giving me little notes
with "I like what I see"
scribbled next to
a phone number
or going to artists' parties
at the Center for Creative Studies
on John R and E. Kirby
white- and black- and asian-americans
all smoking and drinking
getting high on talk
of fascism and culture

and nights of dancing the
City Club punk bar;
men in dresses moving around
umbrellas;
women with pierced nipples showing off;
bathrooms without doors...
pissing in a urinal while
Radonna, a white-haired black gal
stood alongside
looking
and then following me around
the rest of the night,
or Crystal, quietly telling me
that she was a virgin; a sweet black
virgin princess that would only let
me touch her with fingers; letting me hold
those fragile nights together with only my
clumsy hands...but hands are enough
to remember
all of that so
long ago

now living in long winters
of the far north;
lips splitting from
too much dry cold air
or maybe from
not enough kisses.
looking back sometimes wondering
what it was that made
me so much more happy
then than now.

the future of america

JOHN SWEET

no bullets through
the skull of jesse helms
today

just cold september rain
and the silent tears
of battered housewives

just homeless men
eating cigarette butts
on washington ave

and i've decided
to burn an orphan for
every poem i write

two for
every rejection slip
i find in my mailbox

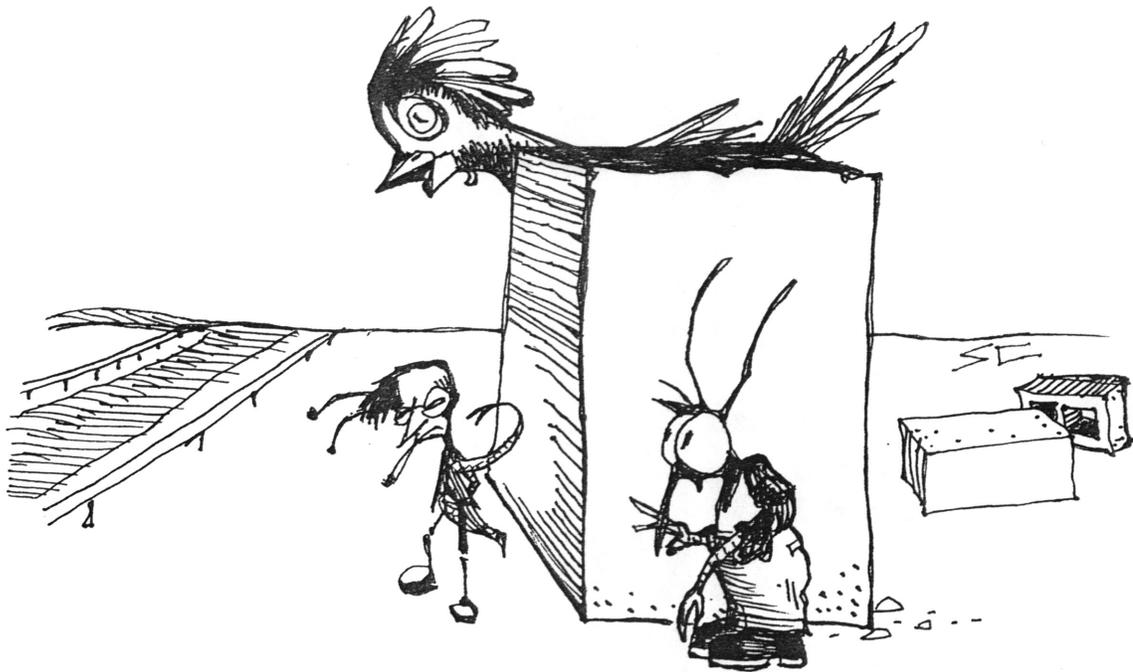
it's my own little
contribution
to the future of america

it's the best way
i know
to make a difference

Parings

PAUL WEINMAN

My bag of fingernail scraps
has filled, bulges
from pants pocket.
"I won't have another wife."
He whispers as he works
at peeling a ragged bit
from his pinky.
A boy, rattling past
on a plastic tricycle
leers impishly nature
calls out ... "Mommy
knows all about it!"
I hurry to the garage
carefully empty the bag
into that box
with that special smell.



'BUGS' BY STEPAN CHAPMAN

Tired Man

CARLUS L. WILMOT

Baby, I am a tired man.
A tired man from 9 to 5.

You don't give me no lovin' baby
Till Friday when the eagle flies.

From Sunday to Thursday,
I'm a broke son-of-a-bitch.
A cheap soup suckin' sucker,
With two left feet.

My heads kinda nappy,
Which I could comb and turn flips.
But I'm yo' sweet lovin' daddy,
When I get my check.

I gotta tell you darlin'
I'm a tired man from 9 to 5.
You don't give me no lovin' baby
Till Friday when the eagle flies.

Lots of gals are very happy
With some neckbone soup,
A bottle of sporty odie
And some ghetto passion fruits.

But you expect diamonds,
A trip around the world.
But \$4.45 an hour
Won't get an Afro curl.

I'm a tired man.
A tired man from 9 to 5.
One day I'll get wise baby,
And get a job that toes the line.

Oh Say Can You See (20s, 60s, 90s)

CARLUS L. WILMOT

White sheets flutter in the night
As screams shoot from mouths
Bruise the sky, then stop.

“Hell we ain’t wrong.”
“Violence is as American as cherry pie.”

Sticks and rocks caress the skulls
Of the SNCC as they sang,
“Ain’t gon’ let nobody turn me around.”

“Shut up all that damn noise.”
Bang, bop, crack, crunch!
“Violence is as American as cherry pie.”

“It was stones yesterday, molotov cocktails today;
It will be hand grenades tomorrow,
And whatever else is available the next day.”

Old Men of North Beach

A.D. WINANS

These old men beat their heads
Nightly against the four walls
Forced to listen to death's call
The pain so great
That a bottle of aspirin
A fifth of whiskey
Brings no relief
Men who envy those fortunate
Enough to have escaped
Men on the verge of suicide
Men who wait with nothing
To look forward to
But an obituary column
So small that
It fits them like
A charm bracelet.

At Last, Now

CHRISTOPHER WOODS

She is turning away, but he isn't beside her yet. He's not even in the room. Turning away from his side of the bed, the slope of the mattress, the shape of the years. Turning away from all that and more, reaching for the lamp. She flips the switch and turns to the darkness. And though she is not thinking of small animals foraging in night fields, she has something in common with them this night. She is going to gulp down the contents of a small brown container hidden under her pillow. She finds it handily, as planned, then turns the bottle top, watches the small pills, her night jewels, as they cascade across the sheet. Hurry now, she says, there's not much time. In the dark her finger-tips collect them one by one. She swallows them like someone in a starving village, desperate and greedy.

Hurry, she tells herself again. She can hear him, for Christ! He's finishing up sloppy in the bathroom. Falls into a wall. Last week the sink on the floor, he spread naked across it, holding it like a life preserver, the sorry bastard. She can see him, Jesus! His shadow stumbles back and forth, back and forth in the crack under the door. He's turning too, she thinks, and she almost smiles that oh so famous weary smile everyone knows, that everyone thinks is her real face because that's all anyone has seen for so many years. Maybe she thinks it's her smile, too. What did she look like before all this?

She watches his shadow, the back and forth business, and wonders if he has his own little bottle of pills in the bathroom. She gobbles her own stash and watches the shadow, a sad little movie, really, but it's really too late for that, for sadness, not now. But damn it, why didn't she think to have a glass of water on the nightstand? The kitchen is too far away now. The bathroom is out of reach, bet then he was always hogging it when she needed it, the sonofabitch.

She'd kill for a glass of water. One pill is lodged in her throat like a small car pulled to the side of the road. She swallows hard, bet the darned little shit is clogging things. It's a bastard pill that wants to keep things from changing, turning into something else. Go on, say it, goddamit, something beautiful, maybe. Heaven. Maybe.

A final flush of the toilet, and it's clear he's left the lid up for a millionth, but this is the last, fucking time. He's coming to bed. He's coming to her in a boat on a bourbon river. He's bombed to shit again. He's coming to bed, a fucking drunken zombie escaped from a cage. She's got to hurry, now. She struggles to eat the pills, stuffing them in, so hurried she starts chewing them and they taste bitter, so awfully bitter, but not for long.

Soon things will change, turn. Her tongue and taste will go numb and only taste beautiful things. Forever. This is foggy, when the door opens, that small moment as he stands there in his striped boxers and yellowed undershirt, squinting, can't see the room in the dark pose, trying to see if things – the dresser, the chair, the rug on the hardwood, the wife, his life – if it's all still there, death do us part, if he can see it then most probably he can negotiate it, all of it. It's just a second, really, peering into the cave of a room, his other hand clawing the bathroom wall for the switch. He finds it, flips it, almost knocking it off the wall, the bathroom goes black and now he's on the night river that leads to bed. A lurch, a few wayward steps, heading home now. His bride awaits him.

She's got her head on the pillow, her hand flipping around on its own, hellbent, fanning

out across the sheet, back and forth, back and forth, grasping for any stray jewels. She wants to know, does she feel anything yet? She really wants to know. Jesus, she needs to know, is anything different yet? Maybe her legs. Yes, they're heavy under the sheets. Maybe she can't move them. Can she? Hard to tell, to know. She's plenty groggy now, sleepy but in a new way. She tells herself she's no sloppy drunk. Hell, she's got no tolerance for booze. And she's not a sloppy pill-popper either, oh no. She's a good girl, popping them in silence, in bed so she doesn't have so very far to fall.

The bed is creaking. He's coming in for a landing. Everything so dreamy, the bed bouncing about now. A good feeling, really, and she's alert enough still to be thankful for this. Oh, it's a little thing, but she's heard you can get real sick, throwing up, all that, but that's not happening now. No, something else is happening now. If you lived here, you'd be home now, she laughs to herself, but no sound comes from her mouth.

There is motion here, rocking, rocking, like a boat on a river in a storm. It is a river dream without a shore. Then a thought comes crashing like lightning. She knows he is pulling her, his hand gripping her shoulder, turning her his way now. That's what he thinks, the jerk. The fucking jerk, he can't see straight but he's going to ride her anyway. She is turning toward him but it's not so bad, she thinks, not like usual. She's turning but it doesn't mean a thing, God bless, not a fucking thing.

She can't see him. She's gone fucking blind. A blessing, a real blessing. He's climbing on top of her but she is already so heavy she can't feel any more weight. Sweet blessing. It is only a dim sensation, a shuddering memory, as he enters her. She wonders if she is still breathing. Is she? Can she? He doesn't know the difference. She doesn't care what happens now, but her last thoughts, there must still be a few left, her last thoughts will be good ones, just before they all turn beautiful.

She thinks she turns her head away from him but she can't be sure of it. Foggy time in London town, she turns, trying to remember an old song, thinking she should have turned away before. Like this, forever. Like she wanted to, for years, another forever. Turn, baby. The way the dead turn away from the living, not because they have given up completely but because it's somehow better, don't ask why.

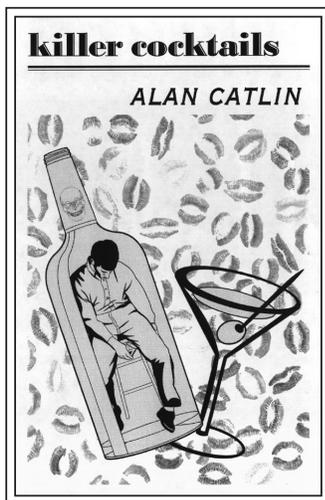
Turn, baby. Now, the beautiful. At last, now. God.



'SELF INDULGENCE' BY CHRISTOPHER M.



ALSO AVAILABLE FROM FOUR-SEP PUBLICATIONS



killer cocktails

ALAN CATLIN

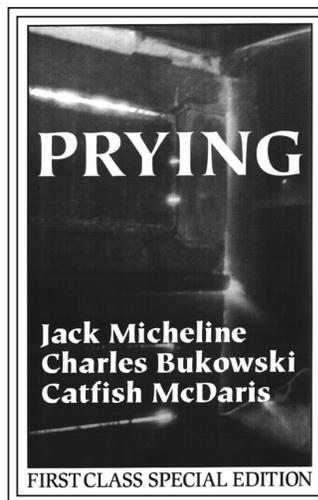
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IN THE CLEARING

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

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PRYING

Jack Micheline
Charles Bukowski
Catfish McDaris

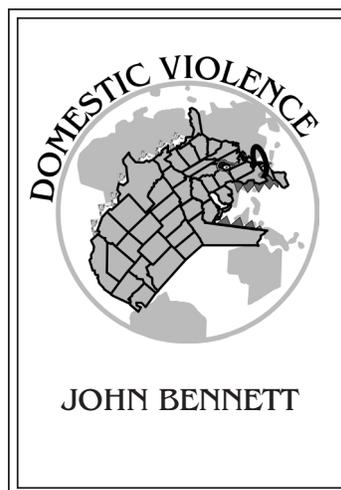
FIRST CLASS SPECIAL EDITION

PRYING is a special edition of First Class featuring the words of Jack Micheline, Charles Bukowski (unpubbed), and Catfish McDaris as well as images by Sinisa Dugonic(Belgrade), Jouni Vaara- kangas(Finland), Carlos Serpas (Mexico), and Mike Tolento (USA)....\$5ppd./glossy cover/bamboo paper/28pp/FS#103.

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JOHN BENNETT



TERMS: I PREFER CASH, BUT CHECKS TO CHRISTOPHER M. ARE OK.

cattle call

First Class is very open to submissions. Especially sought after are pieces of short fiction, but poetics are, of course, accepted as well. I seek the very best words you have available for me to read. I don't pay myself, so I certainly won't pay you, but you will receive at least one copy, maybe more.

There are a few important things to make sure that you do when you submit your work. Please, please, make every attempt to print/type your copy as dark as possible. Also, for the computer users, please do not justify or force-justify your text. Left-justification is preferred by my scanner and deleting all those extra spaces created by justified text sucks. Name and address on the first page of each piece only. Send along a SASE when appropriate. Lastly.....drop me a letter with your submission, it sure beats the hell out of a chunk of submission text and a SASE dropping out on the table without at least a brief greeting.

I make it a point to take advantage of the technology I have available to keep track of everything that comes in and leaves First Class. You can expect timely responses and notifications. I know from experience that it is disturbing not to know the status of your words.

Christopher M.

try these



ANGELFLESH: Jim Buchanan, pobox 141123, Grand Rapids, MI 49514. Please send anything—poetry, artwork, fiction, body parts, sex toys, whatever. \$4/single issue, \$10/year(3 issues plus extras).

NERVE COWBOY: pobox 4973, Austin, TX 78765. Send poems, short stories(up to 5pp), and b&w art w/SASE. Bias toward accessible work that depicts the absurd nature of human experience. \$4/sample.

HEELTAP: Richard D.Houff, 2054 Montreal Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55116. Mostly poetry, excellent production. Send \$4ppd for a sample.

FLASHPOINT: Shannon Colebank, pobox 5591, Portland, OR 97228. Exceptional "issue-oriented" compilation of sorts. Send him \$4 without fail.

AMERICA by A.D. Winans: Quite excellent piece of poetics, dedicated to the working men and women of America, which means all of us. Black Bear Pub., 1916 Lincoln Street, Croydon, PA 19021.

LOVE IS A BROKEN DOWN TRUCK by Joshua Bodwell and Laura Savard: Hand-made and -bound short piece, with a three-color silk-screened cover. A work of art. Send them \$5 and pray there are any left. Excellent production. Bodwell, pobox 4381, Portland, ME 04101.

DREAMS AND GARBAGE AND THE ABYSS by Mark Senkus: 32pp chap, send \$2 to 200 W. Portage #3, Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783.

PURPLE: pobox 341, Park Hills, MO 63601. This is Daniel Crocker's excellent collection of essays, reviews, and criticism featuring an always awesome variety of writers. Send a few \$\$\$ for one today.

TWO NOVELLAS, THE FIRST TIME HE SAW PARIS by Gerald Locklin/WAITING FOR MY BABY by Donna Hilbert: 336pp/\$29.95 + \$3 s/h to: Event Horizon Press, pobox 867, Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240.

THE TROIKA by Stepan Chapman: 250pp/\$15 ppd. to: Ministry of Whimsy, pobox 4248, Tallahassee, FL 32315.

CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN BENNETT – His fourth appearance in FC, a prolific and enduring writer with numerous credits. Most recently, “Moth Eaters”, a collection of short stories from Angelflesh Press (see address in ‘try these’) and “Domestic Violence” available from Four-Sep (see info on page 42).

SEAN BRENDAN-BROWN – Former poetry editor for the Georgetown Review with appearances in a variety of publications. First time in First Class.

ALAN CATLIN – Barmaster in Schenectady, NY. An oft-published and award-winning poet with several excellent chaps. Recently seen in “Press”, his fourth time here. Check out “Killer Cocktails” available from Four-Sep.

STEPAN CHAPMAN - Lives in Cottonwood, AZ and his illustrations have appeared all over the place in the small press. He also writes short stories, appearing in “The Baffler”, “Analog Science Fiction”, and “The Comics Journal.” Second time in First Class.

CARL MILLER DANIELS - A resident of Prell, VA, Carl has appeared in various small-press collections over the last five years. His chapbook ‘Museum Quality Orgasm’ is available for \$6 ppd. from Future Tense Books, pobox 42416, Portland, OR 97242.

DENWORTHY - Lives in Fort Worth, TX, first time on these pages.

JIM DeWITT - Third time in FC. Editor of three publications, author of 34 published books, appearances in over 1200 lit-mags, and nominated for the Pushcart in 1997. Calls Grand Rapids, MI home.

GREG FITZSIMMONS - Working on the release of a chap-book novel about alcoholism, midgets, and blow jobs, as well as a pornographic novel about a schizophrenic hermaphrodite. Third time in these pages. More to come. Write: 1628 W. Ohio Street #2F, Chicago, IL 60622.

JOHN GREY - Fourth-timer in First Class. John is an Australian living in New England earning a living in computers, writing stuff in his spare time.

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER - Widely published phenom in the small-press, this is the fourth time he has appeared in FC. Lives in Austin, Texas. Be sure to read “In the Clearing” from Four-Sep.

GERALD LOCKLIN - Long time, far-reaching presence, with an abundance of publishing credits. Go to the library and reference “Contemporary Writers” for his biblio. Teaches at CSU-Long Beach and has even lectured in Cuba on Hemingway.

DUSTY ERIK LUNDE - First time here, out of Tacoma, WA.

CHRISTOPHER M. - Just some guy who takes pictures and writes words once in a while.

CONTRIBUTORS

CHRIFTOR MAROVSK - Reclusive emigré who prefers Kurt Weill to Abba.

THOMAS MICHAEL McDADE - Resides in Monroe, CT, and has appeared widely in the small-press. This is his second appearance in FC.

ERROL MILLER - Prolific voice in the small and medium press since 1972. Miller has several chaps and two larger collections forthcoming. "Downward Glide" is available for \$12 ppd. from BGB Press, 158 King Street, Northampton, MA 01060.

B.Z. NIDITCH—The artistic director of "The Original Theatre", with both national and international publishing credits. This is his fourth appearance here and the third of his short plays presented in FC.

BEN OHMART - First time on these pages, resident of Boalsburg, PA.

DONALD RAYMOND POLLOCK - Resident of Chillicothe, OH. Pollock has had pieces appear in Chiron Review, Nerve Cowboy, and others. First time here.

LON SCHNEIDER - Studies Swedish, French, Spanish and Hebrew in St. Louis, MO. First time here.

MARK SENKUS - Survives up in the no-man's land tourist trap of Sault Ste. Marie. Second appearance in First Class. Also has a mag, 'Simple-Minded Cocktail', 409 E. Spruce St., Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783.

JOHN SWEET - This is the fourth time Sweet has graced these pages. His words abound in the small press, and he also has a few chaps out. Calls Endicott, NY home.

PAUL WEINMAN - First time in FC, Weinman lives in Albany, NY.

CARLUS L. WILMOT - Lives in Milwaukee, and bears a distinctive voice. First time here, look for more.

A.D. WINANS—Born in S.F., he is the author of 14 books of poetry. His latest, "San Francisco Streets" out this year by Ye Olde Fonte Shoppe Press. Third appearance.

CHRISTOPHER WOODS - Lives in Houston, TX. First time here, with previous work published in various periodicals. His play, A Woman on Fire, was produced last year in Memphis.

A booming thanks goes to all who have and continue to submit words on paper to First Class. I read every scrap that pries it's way into my pobox, and enjoy and appreciate the efforts of those who have the balls to submit their words to other's scrutiny. Please continue to pleasure me with your submissions. — Christopher M.

Also, a moment to consider the words and works of Jack Micheline, who is no longer among the living.

**thank you for your time
i hope that you were pleased
come back again in may/june
for first class number eight
please do subscribe**