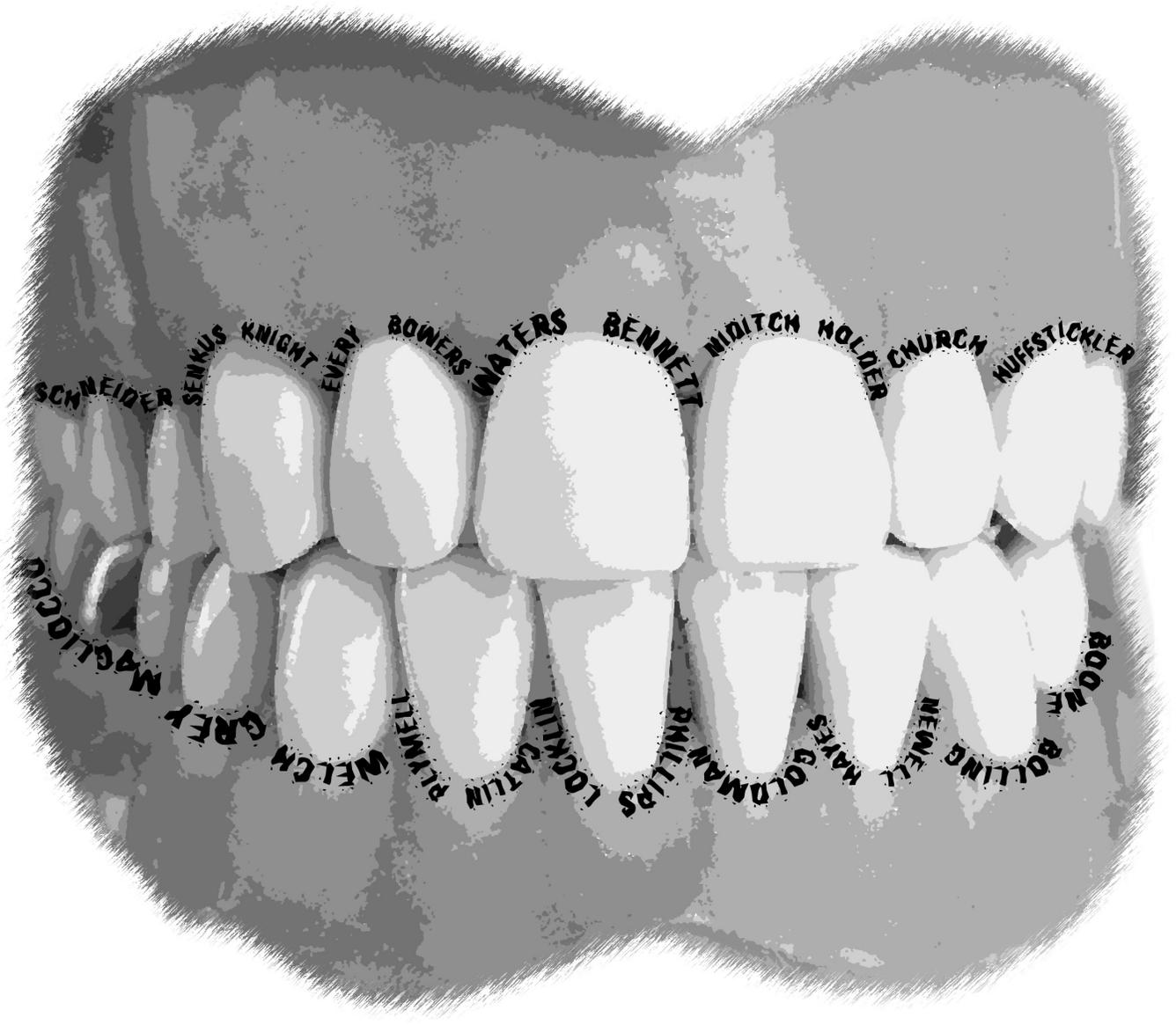


ISSUE NINE/FALL 1998  
FIVE BUCKS

# First Class



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**ISSUE  
NINE**



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# Countries

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**JOHN BENNETT**

How many countries can dance on the head of a planet? Right now there are 31 in what they call Europe. 188 in the entire world. Or is it 38 and 181? Who knows for sure? You open the paper to page 10 on Sunday morning and there it is, another country is born or bites the dust or splits in two like some microscopic oddity, and just like that you're expected to speak a language you weren't speaking when you went to bed on Saturday night. The language of love, perhaps, shackled up with a wench from the hill country.

She'd come to town for supplies in her pickup and was doing just fine until she paused to look up at the sky. The sky has no borders, no language, it catches her off guard, and when she comes back to earth, something in her's been cancelled. She crosses the street, steps into the bar, and sits down on a stool.

The next thing she knows it's midnight and she's pouring her heart out. And then she's in your bed, holding tight, and when you wake up the next morning and step into the sun, you find that where the night before you were from the same country, now one of you is a stranger. It's right there on page ten of the paper, your country's been broken in two, and how will she ever get home to her husband and children?

You return to the bar. Order beer and play music. Start dancing slow. You don't even know her name. Sexy Sadie, perhaps. Sad-eyed lady of the lowlands. You hold her tight. All you've got is each other.

Two men in strange uniforms come thru the door. You keep dancing. Pretend not to notice. What else can you do? Later you'll check the want ads, but for now you hang on to the moment and don't ask any questions.

"Let's go back to your place," she says when the men in uniform leave. You head for the door. Outside all the street signs have been changed and everyone's talking in tongues. It's hard to remember how things used to be. You feel like she's been with you forever. When you turn to tell her so, she's not there. Memory is treason, you realize, and slip into the shadows.

# Long Live the King

**JOHN BENNETT**

Hints clues and stumbling blocks, a stitch in time and they leave a sponge in your belly, rage against the dying of the light and the curtain comes down to cat calls and tossed bottles, cat calls and cattle calls, the light doesn't die, it wanes, John Wayne duking it out with the bad guys in a cancerous canyon, they lie when they tell you you can't get there from here, you can get anywhere from here, this is the center of the universe, the universe doesn't exist outside your mind, you are God and you are a goner, even God falls face first in the dust when the Duke of Death fires his piece in the spaghetti-western shoot-out we call life, you should have stayed in the saloon slamming down whiskey and cheating at cards, lusting after the new whore from Rhode Island, sweet seventeen, sweet molestation, only her eyes remain virgin, the windows to her soul.

You could have gone there, you could have hid in her soul like some mama's boy, but no, roaring six-shooters and hot blood in the sand, that's your idea of a good time, a locker-room ethic, and before you can slap leather you're sucked in thru Death's eyes and it's done. God is dead, not once but a billion times over, each time a child is devoured by hunger, each time a bus hits a blind man, each time a cancer reams out a lung – strokes, tomfoolery, syphilis and pneumonia, let me count the ways God dies.

All you need is love. Christ said that and got nailed to a cross. John Lennon said it and got shot thru the head. A generation of acid-freaked starry-eyed girls said it and got pregnant, named their children Sky and River, spent years trying to track down the husband, free love for sale, a twist of lemon in the Ken Kesey punch bowl, this used to be your town, but then the music died.

Remember the day? Bye bye Miss American Pie, centerfold queen with a flower in your hair, from acid to needles to AIDS. Hello! I love you! Won't you tell me your name? Sky? River? Pleased to meet you, welcome to my game.

Grunge, Punk, Heavy Metal, lines on the mirror, lines on her face, too tired to make it, too tired to care about it, just let me go faster, sweet mama, chasing my tail in a blur of confusion and hurt.

God down on his knees with his head in a toilet bowl that don't flush. His good friend the doctor won't even tell him what it is he's got. Not a pretty picture. Not a good scene. Not what Moses had in mind when he parted the waters. When Christ walked on the water, making off with the fishes and loaves, leaving nothing behind but miracles. On your feet Lazarus. Walk on out of here. The difference between a kid and a mystic in an ocean of acid is the mystic can swim.

You're God, love it or leave it, either way. Tie off, shoot up and go bonkers – nothing changes. The beat goes on. God is not love, God is life everlasting, tenacious as a tick in a bear's back. God is a jack-in-the-box, popping up all over the place. Death push God down over here, God pop up over there. You can't keep a good God down. The one true God, that's you, old buckaroo. How does it feel to be on your own with no direction home?

Now that you know where you stand, what's your plan? Has anything you've done ever worked? Life is death's mistress. Bed down with your master. Seduce him with the heart

of a child, with the flowers of spring. Bring a smile to his dark brooding face.

Death is king. Long live the king. Existence is a twist of fate. Embrace it like something nubile on a hot equatorial night. Sally forth. Long tall Sally. The way she wraps those tan legs around you, snaps your spine and bites off your head. The black widow of love. The sting of creation. That deep ache in your heart that when you let it, turns into song.



*Collage*

*Charles Plymell*

**COLLAGE BY CHARLES PLYMELL**



kon looks over his shoulder toward the crouching  
mountain and its burden of véracité

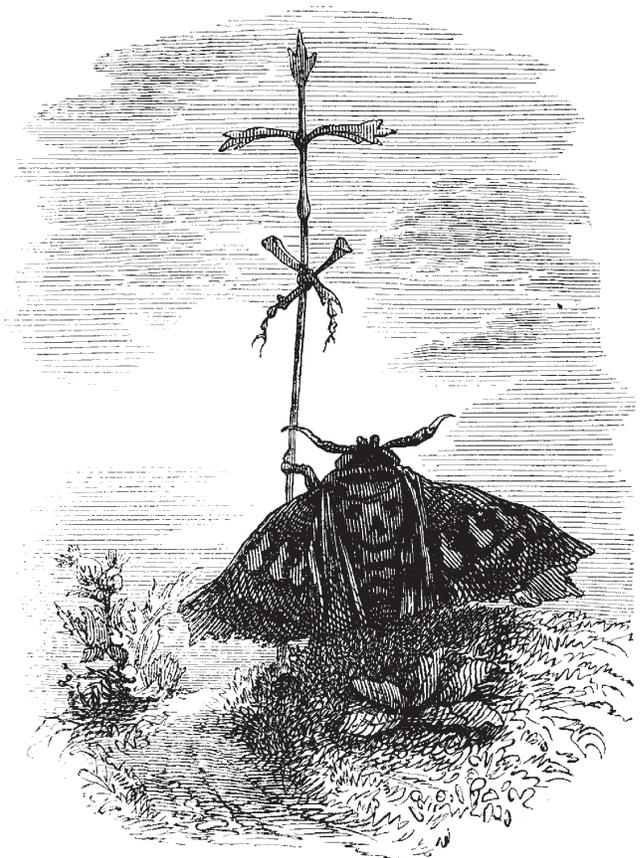
the word dictator,  
an aristotle of apartheid and hierarchy; that is  
how i think of him, kon says  
coanna smiles; yes, she says, you have him  
she is removing the sandals and the loose gown  
her body stands open to the day, a mingling of races  
evident in the brow and eyes and song of color  
kon does the same, walking to  
her from the discarded clothes

they are at water's edge  
we will leave him, coanna says; lissp and his disease,  
lissp the artifact of the dead but still murderous  
culture

they walk into the spray and flow past  
the knees upward  
the words claiming to be windows to the thing  
rather than mirrors of seduction, kon says,  
rather than meaning hatcheries of death  
proliferating endlessly, tediously

coanna embraces him briefly then steps ahead  
she is laughing now:  
words drown in water much as the snuffed flame in  
darkness or the pains and facades and treacheries  
in orgasm

they are stroking away from shore now,  
going



# Hilarious

---

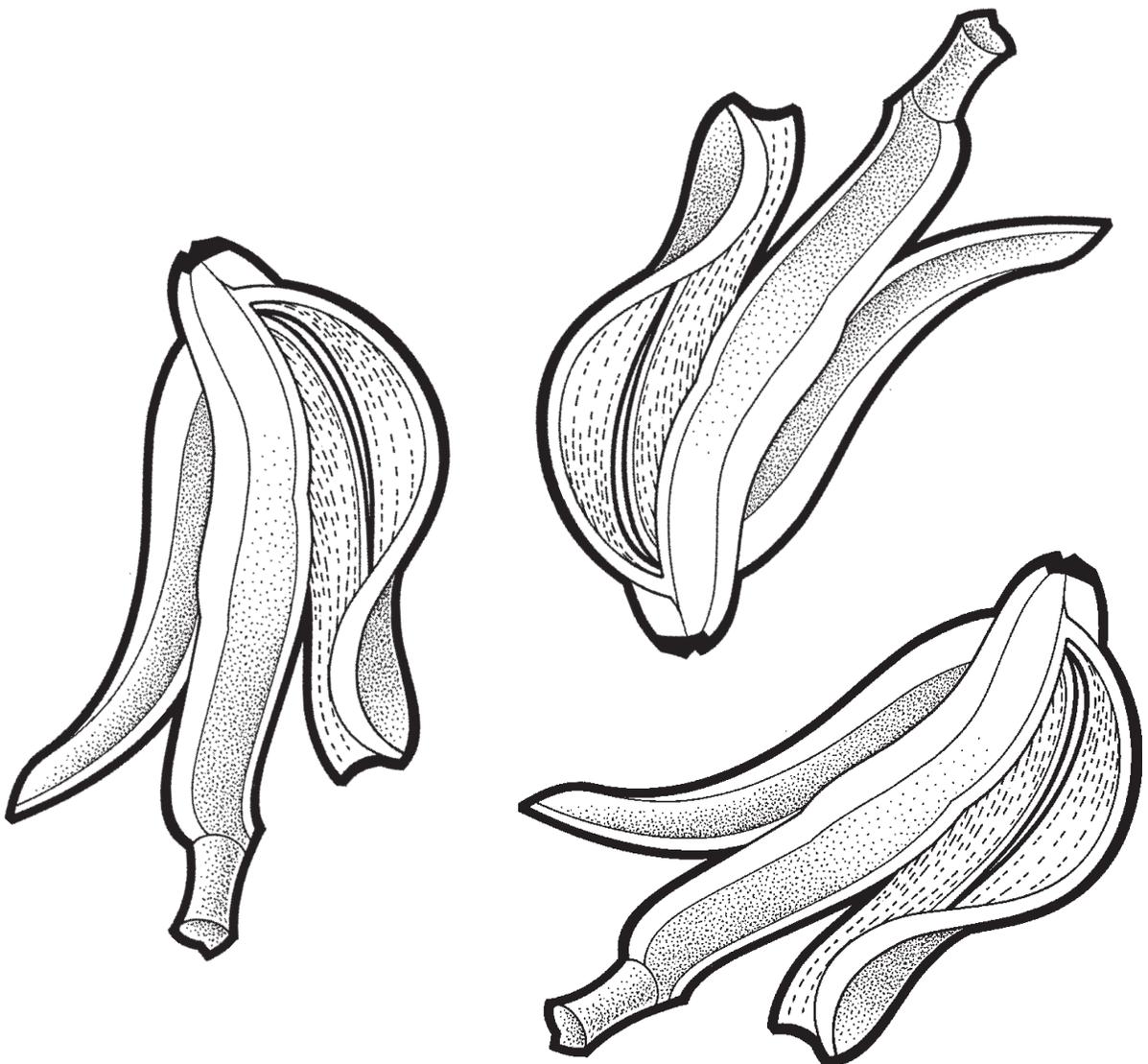
RANDY BOONE

I remember in tenth grade shop class this one Tuesday  
when I took one of those  
wooden vices that opens and closes  
when you turn those threaded screwdriver things  
and anyway I put the vice on my head  
and I screwed it up really tight  
so that the wooden blocks  
were sticking up over my head  
and the long screwdriver things  
were sticking out of the sides of my head  
and then one kid noticed it  
and he pointed at me  
and then other kids started looking  
and everyone started laughing  
and it really started to hurt  
and no one even thought that maybe  
they should try to loosen the screwdriver things  
and my face felt like it was getting really red  
because it felt really really hot  
but even I couldn't stop laughing  
because everyone else was laughing  
and some kids weren't even looking at me anymore  
because they were bent over  
because they were laughing so hard  
so that when I fell over  
everyone thought it was because I was laughing so hard too  
so no one really cared  
and even some of them fell over  
because now they were laughing even harder  
because my face was so red  
and because I was laughing  
and because I fell face-first onto the floor  
and then I started pounding my fist into the floor  
but it wasn't because I was laughing  
but everyone else started pounding on the floor too  
and they were doing it  
because they were laughing  
and maybe only because I was doing it  
and I suppose that even after I died  
they were still pounding on the floor  
and laughing  
because when I finally got to Heaven  
with the vice thing still stuck on my head  
and the wooden blocks  
still pointing up in the air  
and the long threaded screwdriver things  
still sticking out the sides of my head  
I noticed that God was pounding his fist on the floor  
and he was laughing too.

# The Land of Ochk

**SUSANNE R. BOWERS**

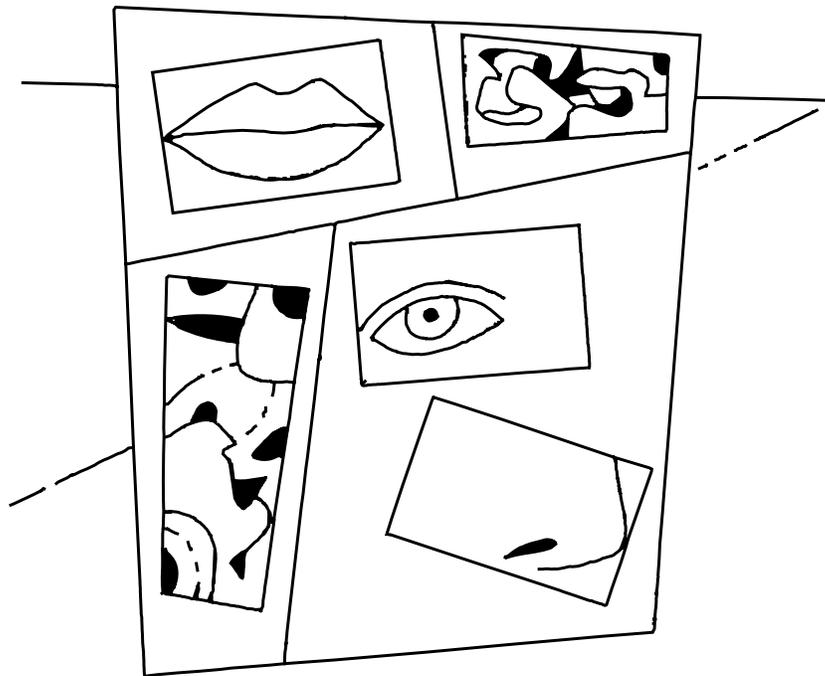
It was a village made up of small huts gathered around a pond. In the huts lived people in various stages of intoxication and detoxification. All of them appeared to be crazy. A stranger, coming in, would have a hard time knowing who was what. The subject matter of any and all conversations centered on the plight of the individuals and on bananas. Bananas in various stages of ripeness and unripeness. Banana stars were given to those who found the best, most perfect ones. Not green, not black. Just right. All other subjects were censored. "Did you see the bananas I found in town?" would be a typical opening remark. "I spent hours looking for the ones you like." All questions were actually comments, as no one really cared about answers. After bananas came sweats, shakes, sips, and, of course, lies. The stranger would have to sort through the lies and the bananas to figure out what was going on. Even then, he wouldn't know. Some visitors took to drink, others took off. The people seldom knew if they had left, or even been there.



# White Death (Moonshine and Caustic Soda)

ALAN CATLIN

he called and by way  
of explanation claimed it  
was something the boys  
back home down South had  
been drinking for generations  
which I presumed the way his  
family got together, intermarried  
and had children meant a home  
brew they'd been making since  
The Korean War to entertain  
the troops not fighting overseas.  
The caustic soda was to throw off  
The Revenuers – rhymes with sewers  
to you Northern boys – he sd –  
& for cleaning out them old drain  
pipes – I knew better than to ask  
which drain pipes he meant.



WALT PHILLIPS

# The Chronicle of Young Satan

ALAN CATLIN

was going to  
be the title  
of the best  
selling book  
of how he ended  
up as a mass  
murder of un  
speakable violence  
and lack of com  
passion He had  
that special  
strange glow  
the truly weird  
have a kind of  
gauze covering  
his eyes that  
filtered out  
any traces of  
humanity threatening  
to leak in He  
even smelled  
strange like some  
kind of mutant  
life form un  
decided what  
shape to assume  
next In between  
shots of Tequila  
he whistled through  
the gaps where front  
teeth should be  
formulating  
the question  
of the afternoon:  
I haven't eaten  
in days and I  
need something  
solid in my  
stomach Got any  
thing with a  
worm at the bottom  
of a bottle  
?

# Bugging Off

---

DAVE CHURCH

Tiny aliens  
The size of baby bees  
Are crawling through my ears

Into my brain.  
They buzz around in there  
Like they own the place.

Familiar horn blows in the street.  
Better lock the door.  
Close the shade.

Telephone ringing.  
Sounds. . . unfamiliar.  
Could be a set-up.

Distant siren getting closer  
By the second.  
Better turn off the light.

Another familiar horn.  
Telephone still ringing.  
Better pull the plug.

There's a fly in the window sill  
With clipped wings.  
Better buy more hamburger.

I'm out of bread.  
There's a jar in the closet  
Full . . . of dead moths.

Maybe the spiders will eat  
Them.  
Better hide the fly.

My nerve endings are burning up.  
I am controlled by an electrical box  
On the outside of my walls.

The switch is broken.  
The energy in here is super kinetic  
With dangerous potential.

I saw myself in a dream...dancing  
In a field of long-stemmed roses.  
A single hawk hanging in the sky.

I'm all I can handle these days.  
I've basically checked out.

Pretty soon

I'll be in a white room  
Sipping from a paper cup.  
I knew it would all come to this.

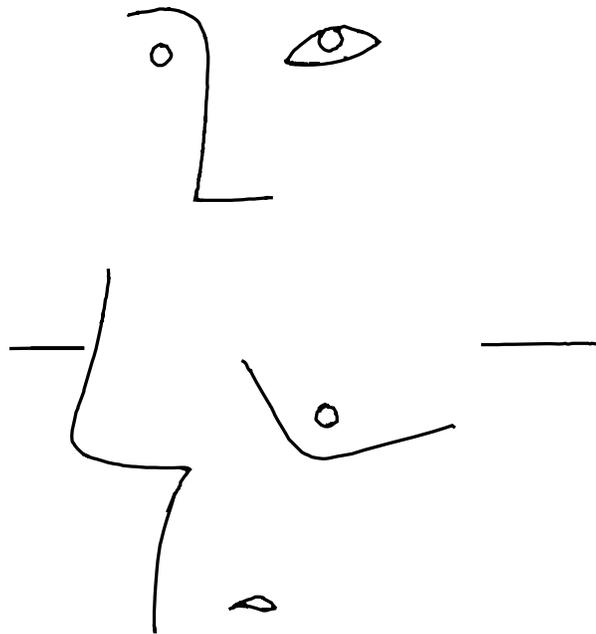
Better unlock the door.  
Open the shade.  
Turn on the light.

Plug in the phone.  
Turn the radio on.  
I don't know the time or day.

The aliens are crawling out my eyes  
Onto the floor.  
Spiders search and destroy them.

I hear something buzzing around  
In my brain  
Like it owned the place.

WHERE DID I HIDE THAT FLY?



WALT PHILLIPS

# Alexis For Sale

---

GARY EVERY

“I hate bugs,” she said, swatting one away, taking another sip from her glass of wine. She had brought the wine with her as she came up and knocked on the front door. The wine was from Hungary. I had never heard of wine from Hungary but the label was written in Hungarian with the picture of a big red bull plastered in the center. It was a lusty virile bull; the kind you imagine raping Europa, grinning lewdly at me from this bottle of red, red wine.

The redness of the wine reminded me of a letter that Alexis had once left me on my front door. The note was written on scented stationary and she had painted a watercolor woman in the corner, black hair swept over her forehead – covering one eye while the other stared seductively. The note had told me flat out that if I wanted to get laid this particular night I should come over to her place, but she warned me that if I “wanted to climb to the heights of orgasmic nirvana delights then I would fly to the heavens atop the red wings of glory.”

“Bugs,” Alexis said, “are a world unto themselves and not a part of the natural order of things. And that is why I hate them.”

She took another sip of her blood red Hungarian bull wine and crossed her legs; long and powerful. Alexis was a big athletic girl, swimming every day, and I could not take my eyes off her legs; thin lines of sweat collecting in the creases of her muscles.

“See,” she said, her arms flailing like a horse’s mane, “how prolifically the bugs breed in the summer heat, feeding off the tormented parched souls. Bugs don’t feed off pollen, they just steal it so no one else can enjoy the flowers.”

Then she swatted the air around her, complaining the whole time about the unwanted suitors; lesbians, geeks, and mutant freaks who were always swarming around her. It was enough to send her off on one of her long winded philosophical tirades. An evening with Alexis meant talking about the subjects Alexis wanted to talk about because she did most of the talking. She took off talking about how she had lost her innocence and grown cynical long ago. “Growing up as a little girl” she said, “I believed that the only two pure things in life were love and art.”

After several heart breakings she had grown disillusioned with love. “Love,” she said, “Is an economic transaction between individuals and sex is just one of the more popular coins of the realm.”

One summer Alexis had gone to Amsterdam, visiting the red light district where there were women as beautiful as any movie star or magazine centerfold sitting for hire in the windows. The irony was that by the time a man had selected a working girl in his price range he was back to the level of feminine prettiness that he was accustomed to anyhow. It revealed how well the free market system worked. Only art remained pure, Alexis reasoned, probably because anybody who was worth a damn couldn’t make a plugged nickel off their art.

“The only job that I ever held which I liked,” Alexis said, “the only job I was ever any good at...” she paused to wipe away a black curl from her forehead, “...was being a prostitute.”

“When I knocked on the door the men always seemed pleased to see me. They weren’t

used to voluptuous call girls in their middle thirties, women who actually enjoyed their work. Most of the hookers in this town are twenty year old anorexic cokeheads. I have a good body, I know how to dress, and I know how to please a man. I was good at my job.”

I told Alexis about my first and only visit to a brothel and how I had been tossed out on my ear. It was one of those legal brothels along the Nevada highways and it wasn't my fault we were tossed out, but my friend's. Not that he did anything rude or lewd inside the house of ill repute; in fact, he was gay. At the time, I was a virgin, although I guess that no one could tell just by looking at either one of us. I think my virginity may have been why I was there in the first place; my homosexual friend was curious to see what would happen if he put my stated sexual preference to the test. He was even willing to pay to satisfy that curiosity but we never even seated ourselves at the bar before we were asked to leave. The madam explained that it would be bad for business for her regular clients to see my friend – a black man – hanging around her business establishment.

Alexis laughed and squeezed my knee, “You are so Norman Rockwell. You are the only guy I know who could start a story on the steps of an entrance to the brothel with his virginity and end the story with his virginity still intact. Congratulations.”

I was not sure if that was a compliment or an insult. Alexis probably did not mean it either way, she had a style of painting the world in a canvas of bright colors and broad sweeping strokes like Chagall on crystal meth, Jackson Pollock throwing up, or Van Gogh with a hard on, dipping more than his brush in the paint can. If Alexis had been Vincent Van Gogh she would have found something much more exciting than an ear to cut off and send to her lover.

“You'll be happy to know,” Alexis said, “That back when I was a whore I was an equal opportunity whore – I never would have turned your friend away just because he was black. I never turned anyone away because of the color of their skin. I fucked them all: black, yellow, red, and any of the many shades of brown. And if there are any little green men out there in UFO's I'll fuck them too – providing they have the cash. I don't take checks or credit cards, especially from outside the solar system and I don't take American Express.”

Alexis rambled on while I listened enraptured, staring at her ample cleavage, “My madam used to give me all the guys no one else was willing to take. The first time she sent me to a house where no one else was willing to go I was terrified, but it turned out he was the nicest man. He was one of the few johns who ever tipped me.”

“How come no one else would touch him?” I asked.

“It wasn't because he was a Hindu immigrant,” she said, “Although I wouldn't wish that badge of geekdom on anyone. It was because he was deformed. He had seven fingers on his right hand; an extra index finger and an extra thumb. It was enough to freak out most of the working girls but it didn't seem like much of a big deal to me. I figured out a way to use it to my advantage, taking his deformed hand and placing one thumb on either side of my nipple.”

“How did it feel?”

“Pretty much the same really, no big deal.”

“Hey,” Alexis said, “maybe I should get a job at the Cottontail Ranch!” Then she laughed, letting loose a good hearty belly laugh. Her voice was raspy; stained with cigarettes and whiskey, and scarred from a battle with her thyroid. The thyroid thing had nearly killed her

and someday the steady diet of beer and hot dogs would surely lead to her early demise. It was the general opinion of the people who knew her that her near death experience had left her a nicer person. Not a nice person just nicer. Alexis laughed some more, mostly just to listen to herself enjoying the sound of her own laughter; a rare trait in most women.

Alexis enjoyed the costumes that went with being a call girl, like a little girl playing dress up. I imagine that she looked pretty hot decked out in stiletto heels, a tight black dress, fishnet stockings, and a beeper tucked into her garter belt. The beeper was for keeping in touch with her madam, Madam Carol. Before she ran the brothel Carol had been a horse trader but apparently running a brothel brought in more money. It brought to my mind the image of a busy Saturday night and Madam Carol lining up the girls to check bloodlines and pedigrees, brushing their hair, grooming coats, swatting rumps, and checking teeth. Alexis said that not much fazed Carol except for worrying about collecting her money every night – the bottom line so to speak.

Alexis held up her empty wine glass and waited expectantly for me to refill it. Which I did, holding the bottle in my hand and attempting to reread the indecipherable Hungarian label, returning the lewd gaze of the red bull. Alexis sipped the wine and crossed her legs, my eyes followed the creases of her skirt upwards. My mind returned to the image of the bull and Europa until I decided that I would really rather be the swan getting a piece of Leda. Different strokes for different folks.

“Ever do a Hungarian?” I asked, not sure where the question had come from, the wine making my head swim with a strong buzz.

“Just once,” Alexis said, “He is the one who turned me on to the wine. Do you like it?”

“Yes,” I lied, the swill tasting like it had been mixed with radiator fluid. That was probably what gave it such a kick.

Alexis told me the story:

“It was a hot boring summer, a lot like this one and I saw this transient hitchhiking by the side of the road. I was bored and looking for something to do, so I pulled a U-turn and picked him up, asking him where he wanted to go. In a thick Hungarian accent he suggested Downtown Liquors. So we drove around all day and must have finished three bottles of Hungarian red wine. He told me all these great stories about life on the road as a hobo and others comparing Hungarian and American prisons. They were great stories so I gave him a blow job and dropped him off.”

Man, I was envious. I could have used a blow job right about then.

“The guy turned out to be a total psycho,” Alexis said. “Remember my cute little pick up truck?”

She had a bright red, cherry red, pick up truck and had mounted a set of steer horns on the hood. The horns always reminded me of gynecologists stirrups and I had fantasies of laying Alexis down on the hood and propping her ankles up on the tip of each horn. I smiled. I had to turn the bottle of wine around, feeling self conscious like the red bull was staring at me; laughing lewdly.

Alexis continued, “That transient must have loved the blow job because he began stalking me. One night while I was in a bar he threw a molotov cocktail into the cab of my truck and burned it to the ground.”

“Aaaaaah!”

Suddenly Alexis screamed, standing up out of the chair and threw her glass onto the ground, spilling wine all over the floor.

“Damn insects!” she shouted, shaking loose a june bug from her hair. “Bugs always chasing me around like lovers I don’t want; men without money and horny, lonely lesbians. It was bugs that got me out of prostitution.”

“It must have been an omen from God or something,” Alexis, sitting down, not quite recomposed. “Madam Carol sent me to the house of this one guy who must have been a Satanist or something, because when I walked in he was all decked out in these black robes and there were all these upside down crucifixes hanging on the wall, candles burning, and he was sharpening knives. Suddenly, I just got the creeps and I knew that if I walked very far inside that house that I would never come back alive. So I ran.”

“I didn’t have any place in particular to run so I drove around in my truck the whole time, just driving around in circles while my beeper went off every five minutes as Madam Carol was trying to figure out where in the hell I was. After all that driving around I finally had to stop and refill my truck with gasoline. I walked inside the mini-mart to pay the attendant and the clerk, this young pimple faced guy, was eyeing me up and down pretty good. After all. I was still dressed up for work, and he was dawdling with the change trying desperately to make conversation when suddenly this lady out at the gas pumps began to scream hysterically.”

“The lady was being attacked by a huge swarm of june bugs, hideous, big, black and green june bugs. A bigger swarm than I had ever seen before, like some sort of biblical plague. The guy behind the counter wanted to be the big hero, grabbed his baseball bat, and ran out to the gas pumps. He began flailing wildly with the baseball bat, attacking the swarm of june bugs. His first swing almost took off the lady’s head. He swung and swung like he was the mighty Casey, one two, three times, and I don’t think he hit a single june bug. The bugs kept buzzing and swarming and the lady just kept screaming in this high pitched hysterical voice. The next swing of the baseball bat smashed into the window cleaning bucket sending soapy water flying everywhere. Even that didn’t faze the bugs, although the lady fell down and started shrieking so that she grabbed onto the counter guy’s leg, forcing him to drag her along as he shuffled across the concrete.”

“When the counter guy decided to grab the baseball bat and go play the hero, he forgot to close the cash register drawer before he ran outside. I reached across the counter, took out what I owed Carol and a little bit more. I rushed outside, leaving the sanctuary of the inside of the store for the air filled with swarming june bugs and ran towards my car with a fist full of money. I couldn’t help it, I was screaming too.”

“I took Carol her money and explained to her about the Satanist, the upside down crucifixes, and the sharp knives. She laughed and told me he was eccentric but not dangerous, one of her best clients. I quit anyways.”

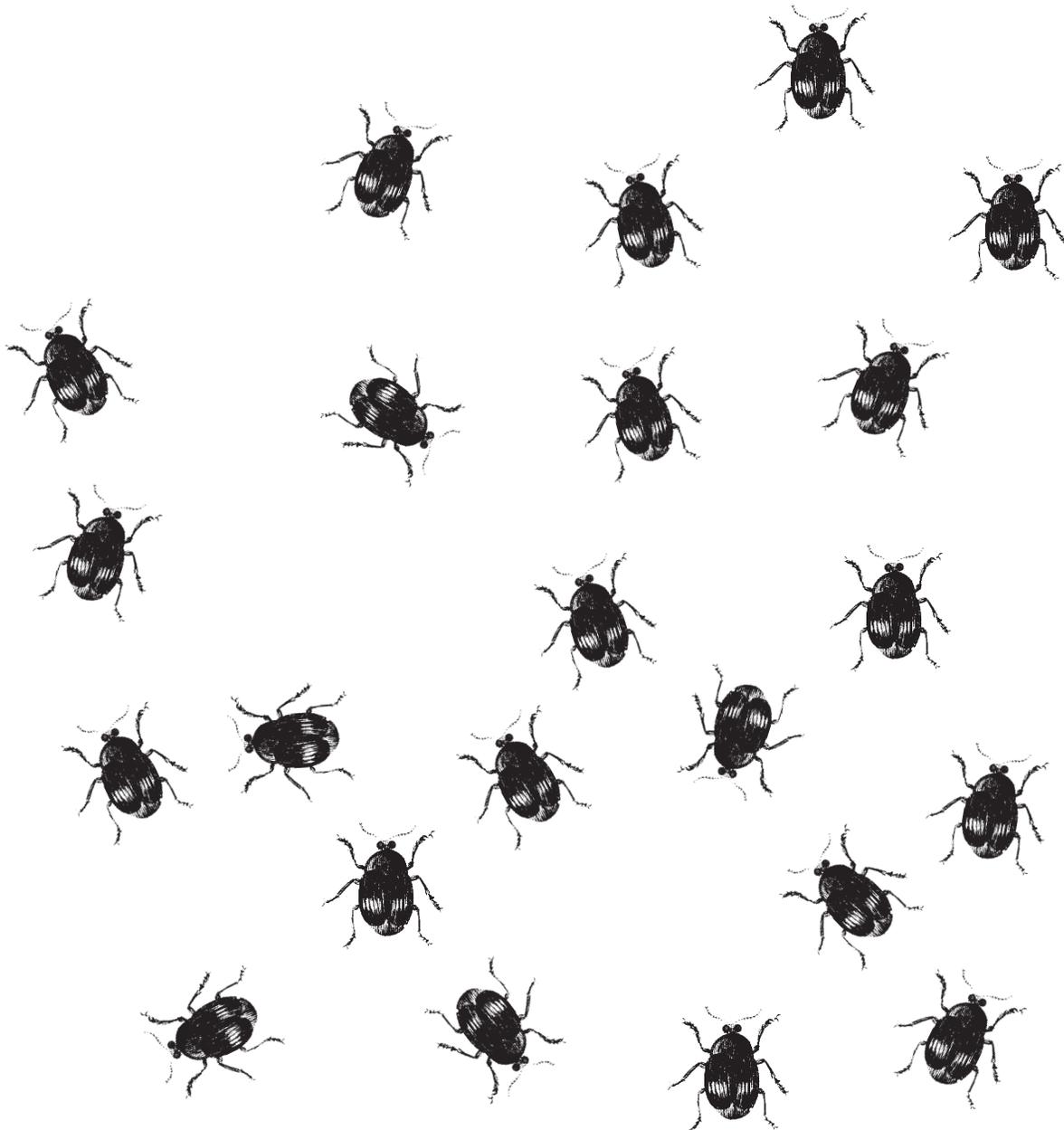
I said, “So that was the end of Alexis?”

“No more Alexis,” she said, “Nobody uses their real name when they’re hooking. It was that same night I went into the bar and that crazy Hungarian burned down my truck. I remember standing there watching the flames while all these june bugs orbited the fire. Bugs are evil and that was an especially evil night.”

She took another deep sip of the wine, draining her glass, “That night changed my whole life but other than that things have been pretty much the same. How have you been?”

I didn’t know what to say so I just shrugged and stared at her cleavage. I chugged down my wine and tried to work up the courage to make a pass at her.

When I finally did make my move, she said yes right away but it turned out she wanted money and I didn’t have that kind of cash. She shrugged and disappeared into the night, said she needed to make rent. I was left alone with an almost empty bottle of Hungarian wine and a picture of a lewdly grinning, laughing bull.



# Little Saigon

---

GARY EVERY

I once lived in a tenement slum  
known in local slang as Little Saigon.  
It had creaking plaster, cockroaches,  
and plumbing gone wrong.

The place was crowded with wall to wall misfits,  
starving artists and crazed rogue anarchist monks.  
There were Asian refugees who had fled civil wars run amok;  
packing themselves 15 into a room  
just like the Chinese nuclear physicists on the floor beneath me.

My favorite neighbors were a family of Vietnamese  
who were enthusiastic in their struggle to survive  
and even thrive,  
eager to make the most of their new country's life.  
Their house was furnished with yard sale things  
discarded trash dumpster treasures.  
The daughter was a beautiful and delicate  
as a fine porcelain figurine.

I would see mom and daughter  
during Sunday morning sunrise strolls  
they would dumpster dive  
behind the local doughnut shop;  
go home and feed the pigeons  
until they were fat enough to pop.

The pigeons gathered flocking full in the backyard  
while Sunday afternoons were a scene  
that was Norman Rockwell serene  
with family barbecues, jokes, laughter,  
and horseshoe players.  
The Tiger Beat attired young men  
showed off for the daughter, speaking loudly  
and smelling of too much cologne:  
scheming American dreamers.

Then one Sunday morning  
I noticed the snares.  
Mom and 'daughter weren't feeding the pigeons  
but luring them.  
They had created a herd  
of urban barbecue meat.

# The Brain Game

---

KENNETH C. GOLDMAN

I have spent the better part of my life denying this truth. My father favored Aaron, my older brother, to me.

There. I've said it. It wasn't always this simple. One's mind unconsciously deceives itself against those tormenting facts that it cannot accept. Dr. Hathaway calls this tendency "The Brain Game", and I had become an adept player. *I must be wrong, it's all in my head* I would convince myself. Once I asked my father outright if my suspicions were legitimate. Without batting an eyelid the old man swore he loved Aaron and me equally.

*Bullshit.*

Like preserving piss in a leaking conduit, Sidney Hathaway calls such convoluted logic in the face of unpleasant reality. He sees this as worse than pointless thinking. This is dangerous thinking. *Sick* thinking.

Of course, I wanted to believe the lie I told myself. I sincerely trusted my father should have loved me. After all, I had never brought shame to myself nor to him, I am and have always been an honest man, a school teacher earning an honest living, if not the most profitable. The old man could have loved me had there been no Aaron, no renowned novelist in the Silverman family. Hell, he would have loved me, if only....

Yes, if only...

See what I mean? It's the same Brain Game we all play.

*Should-a, Could-a, Would-a...*

And if frogs had wings they wouldn't bump their asses when they jumped. The whole world is full of 'should'. That's how Hathaway puts it.

I know the truth now. More precisely, I accept the truth. I have Sidney Hathaway to thank for that.

Of course, when my father died I had all the proof I needed. Dad left virtually everything – a considerable fortune – to Aaron, a man already wealthy in his own right. Suddenly denial was no longer an option for me. The truth stuck inside my belly like a twisted chicken bone devoured whole. I stayed awake nights pacing the floor, a half emptied bottle of Seagrams in my hand, the hot bile churning inside. What had I done to warrant the old man's contempt?

That's when I discovered Dr. Hathaway.

During our first session I boiled my life down for the therapist like a two minute egg. Hathaway took half as long to formulate his response as he rubbed the white stubble that was not quite his beard. I expected nothing less than brilliance worthy of an inscription in stone. But the man's opening remark fell considerably short of brilliant.

"A mind is a terrible thing to lose, Samuel," he said with a perceptible sneer. I had paid half a week's salary to hear the man utter this malapropism.

"One makes the choice to lose his mind and to become infected with the neurosis he has

brought upon himself. Your father preferred Aaron to you. Aaron was the more successful son, the higher intellect. Your father tells you this even from the grave and you, in turn, repeatedly tell this to yourself.”

I winced at the loathsome accuracy of his remark, but Hathaway did not miss a beat.

“I’m simply stating a fact, Samuel. You say your father saw you as an obsequious failure compared to your hugely successful brother? It’s true. The man went to his grave believing that. Live with it.”

Hathaway did not regurgitate the mysteries of the subconscious in the comforting id-and-ego psychobabble of a Freud or Jung wannabe. Nor did he offer the behaviorist variation of meaningless passivity masquerading as unconditional positive regard. Instead, his dark eyes bore into mine like a panther about to strike, indicting me to take responsibility for myself and to leave the perceptions of my father where they properly belonged, anywhere but inside my head.

“Live with it?” I asked. “Easy to say, doctor. Not so easy to do.”

“Unfuck yourself, Samuel. Where the mind goes the ass will follow. Have you prepared to forfeit your sanity? To sit alone in some desolate corner while a pimply orderly with bad breath wipes the drool from your chin? There’s the only logical conclusion of your diseased thinking. Have you made provisions for yourself as a mentally debilitated man? Yes or no? One’s words are a commitment to his actions.”

“No.”

“No? No, what?”

“No, I’m not prepared to lose my mind, doctor. I’m not prepared to drool alone into my old age.”

Hathaway smiled, scribbling something on his note pad in broad strokes. He was working on some sort of sketch, but I couldn’t tell from where I sat.

“Good. We have made a start.”

Sidney Hathaway’s confrontational methods are regarded as absolute quackery by the man’s numerous naysayers who have made careers of repudiating his considerably unorthodox procedures. Single-handedly he has created a schism among psychology’s professional ranks. I read that some bug doctor on Hard Copy railed about how Hathaway’s license should be revoked and then burned for what he had done to one woman.

Hathaway had called a suicidal compulsive eater an idiot for allowing herself to feel poorly about being 150 pounds overweight. Shortly before their first session the woman gorged on a last supper consisting of several courses, then tried hanging herself from an exposed beam inside her kitchen. Because she was so incredibly fat the rope snapped, and the woman immediately woofed her steak dinner all over her linoleum.

Ten minutes into their session Hathaway faulted her lack of foresight for not selecting a thicker rope. He told this woman that her self-deception had caused the useless hemp to snap just as it had caused her to grow to the size of a sperm whale. She had deceived herself believing there was no cause-and-effect relationship between her being so huge and the utterly ridiculous circumstances resulting from this. The woman was a sow living in a world where sows appeared ridiculous, a world that did not give a shit about porkers like her. She was a fool to expect sympathy and understanding from anyone less than two

hundred pounds who was not Richard Simmons, to hope for anything more than laughter and derision. She was the grotesque slob she had chosen to become.

Without completing her first session the patient fled the doctor's office in tears. Sued the pants off the man too, the bug doctor told Hard Copy.

*Hathaway's critic failed to mention that today the woman weighs fifty pounds less than the day she took her high jump off that kitchen stool.*

Of course, the doctor's take-no-prisoners reputation is legionary. He ventures beyond the safer perimeters of the acceptable tenants of psychotherapy, and that simple fact led me to Hathaway's door. I had sampled a backfield of therapists whose more conventional methods did about as much good as a witch doctor's voodoo dance. I had no further need of these pedantic milquetoasts, and Sid Hathaway seemed the best man for the job. Just how far his pedagogic methods might bend the rules of accepted psychotherapeutic ideology future theorists can decide from their own padded cells.

Hathaway's office proved a reflection of the man himself. There hung no colorful modern art on the walls to distract one into thinking he had found some sort of sanctuary from the detestable world beyond the doctor's door, not even a modestly framed college degree to authenticate his merit for his borderline cynics. There was a small window, but the doctor always kept the blinds pulled as if the sunlight required an appointment just like everyone else. The place was an exercise in minimalism, containing only a desk, two chairs, and a black vinyl couch which became my pew of choice for our sessions together. Although Hathaway clearly was a fastidious man, the room's symmetry appeared completely casual without being even remotely fashionable. The office, if given its own unassuming voice, might have declared "No shell games here, sports fans. Now let's get down and boogie."

I offer this typical Hathaway moment from our first session:

"Try this brief mantra, Samuel," he suggests. "it's a small positive affirmation. Repeat what I say..."

*The hell with you Father! The hell with you, Aaron!*

*I'm worth something and you fuckers can't hurt me now!"*

I half smile, but Hathaway doesn't smile back. I dutifully repeat the doctor's words. Suddenly Hathaway seems ready to laugh himself sick.

"Not much of a skeptic, are you?"

"You sit here chanting this numbnuts nonsense simply because I tell you to do so? You believe shouting these words to yourself will make a difference because I tell you it will? You're an educated man, Samuel, and yet you've convinced me that you're an imbecile."

"I don't under--"

"--Of course you don't understand. You're too busy allowing other people to think for you, to define who you are. Your father rejects you, and in turn you reject yourself. Your brother succeeds while you mutate into the failure he obliges you to become. Then you come here thinking I hold the answer, that I might whisper 'booga booga' into your ear and miraculously cure you? I'm full of shit, Samuel, as are your father and your famous brother. We know nothing about what goes on inside Samuel Silverman's head. Still, you hand over the keys to your mind to us, and you enter into a pissing contest for the rights to your sanity. You play this ludicrous game of favorite son, get sucker punched in the

balls, and then wonder why you lose.”

Hathaway returns to his note pad for more feverish sketching or scribbling, I still cannot determine which. The man’s raving semantics creates a hall of mirrors inside my brain. Of course. I understand now, this was Hathaway’s intent from the start.

Pissing contest, he calls it. How odd he selects those words. The doctor has opened a door into the darkest realms of my psyche.

“I have this recurring dream,” I tell him.

“Dreams are bullshit. Cathartic vomit.”

“Nevertheless...”

Hathaway smiles at my insistence.

*I’m on this huge yacht docked in a harbor with others just like it. There’s this incredibly decadent party going on. People are laughing, drinking, kissing. Everyone is in white. Many beautiful women are standing about making conversation with the men. I hear only murmurs, no actual words because I’m not really part of what’s happening, I’m like a little kid with his nose pressed to the windowpane.*

*Aaron is there, and he is talking to the most gorgeous creature I have ever seen, although my brother has a stunning wife and two daughters at home. None of this seems to matter. The woman touches his shoulder as they speak and she laughs at the amusing stories he tells her.*

*I’m standing there, and all I can think about is I have to piss, I have to piss the greatest piss in the history of the world. There is nowhere to go, no place to relieve myself, and my bladder stings as if a hive of bees is buzzing inside my groin. I know I’m going to wizz right there in my pants if I wait one moment more.*

*Aaron’s wine glass is on the table. I look at it, look at him and at the woman still engaged in conversation.*

*...and then I piss into my brother’s wine glass in full view of everyone.*

Hathaway interrupts.

“And pissing into your brother’s wine glass makes you feel...?”

The doctor’s question seems ludicrous but I know Hathaway better than that.

“..Good. It makes me feel good. Embarrassed, but relieved too.”

“You did what you had to do. And you did it right there in front of God and everyone else dressed in white?”

“Yes.”

“And then?”

“Then? Nothing. Then the dream ends. After the dream I always wake up to a wet bed.”

Hathaway leans forward showing his teeth.

“Mind puke, Samuel, that’s what your dream is. You piss into your brother’s wine glass and you think this means you’re expressing your true feelings to him? It’s a lie you’re

telling yourself. You've accomplished nothing except to soak your sheets, white sheets I'd venture if I gave a rat's ass about Freudian psychology. I would suggest you try aiming that urine at his Chardonnay for real if you really want your dream to have taught you anything."

Hathaway sketches some more, almost feverishly this time like a mad symphony conductor slashing at the air. The curiosity is killing me, and I strain my neck to see. Smiling, the doctor turns the note pad away from me and holds it tightly against his chest.

"When you're ready, Samuel. Not one minute sooner."

He ends our first session that moment.

My subsequent appointments with Dr. Sidney Hathaway were just as frustrating.

From Session Two:

*"Did you love your father, Samuel? Do you right at this moment love the man who wounds you even from within his stinking casket?"*

*"Yes. Yes, I loved my father ... still love him ... very much."*

*"And Aaron, whom you clearly resent and envy? Do you love your brother as well?"*

This takes a moment.

*"Yes. I love Aaron too."*

Hathaway's eyes set a bead on mine.

*"You hesitated Samuel. You had to give my question a second thought, didn't you? And when you spoke about your father, when you told me you loved him, loved him very much, do you know what your hands were saying? Look at your hands now, Samuel. Tell me what they are saying even now as we speak."*

I look down at my hands. I have balled each into a fist.

*"Now tell me again, Samuel. Do you love your father...?"*

From Session Three:

*"You never speak about your mother, Samuel."*

*"My mother is dead. When I was four she died of a cerebral hemorrhage."*

*"And this made you feel...?"*

*"Alone. Abandoned I guess. I was too young to fully understand. I don't remember much about her."*

*"Aaron, the older son, remembers her better?"*

*"He's six years older. Yes, suppose he remembers her better."*

*"Had a real mother six years longer than you, did he?"*

*"Yes."*

*"Got the better part of that slice of pie too. Lucky little bastard that Aaron, eh?"*

Session Four:

The most painful hour I have shared with the doctor. I speak of my failed marriage. My subsequent impotency. Short sorry episodes of whoring, drinking and ultimately the leave of absence I took from teaching when I couldn't spend another moment in a classroom before my students. I tell Hathaway about the days on end I didn't leave my bed.

I mention also during this time that Aaron's second novel has become a best seller. The dedication he has written inside reads "To my father."

Hathaway does not say a word.

*He does, however, continue to sketch.*

Session Five:

*"Do you ever cry Samuel?"*

*"I don't think I'm capable of crying doctor."*

*"Incapable of crying? I doubt that."*

Hathaway slaps me hard. Slaps me two additional times even harder, then asks me again.

*"Do you ever cry Samuel?"*

Session Six:

Hathaway says nothing.

I say nothing.

The hour passes.

Hathaway sketches.

Session Seven:

*"Ever watch cartoons, Samuel? Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck?"*

*"Not since I was a kid, no."*

*"Remember how Bluto used to kick the shit out of Popeye, flattening the poor schmuck until he was a mound of twisted flesh wearing a sailor suit? Suddenly this can of spinach appears above old Popeye's head and he gets the idea how to get back at the sadistic fuck. Remember that?"*

*"I don't under--"*

*"Some psychiatrists like to call that spinach moment a Gestalt, Samuel. It's when the connection is made, when the solution comes. The light bulb turns on during that Gestalt moment, present and past come together to reveal the one true answer that has really been there all along. Are you following me?"*

*"I still don't quite under--"*

Hathaway waits.

*"Don't you?"*

But then came Session Eight:

The breakthrough.

Hathaway knows it. I know it.

Without my asking to see, he shows me his note pad.

Admittedly, the man's scribbles lack the professional artist's polish as they do any sense of flair, and at first they seem nothing more than a handful of hastily scrawled Rorschachs.

I look closer.

"I wrote the words down whenever you got close to seeing the truth but just couldn't let it out," Hathaway explains. "I took some artistic license to flesh that truth out, of course."

The pad contains the same words written perhaps hundreds of times. Page after page filled with the same words in countless variations forming two dozen assorted shapes and patterns. My mind forms a picture from the doctor's scribbles, the shapes come together. Finally I know, at last I see what has been there all along, the thing I must do, the only thing I can do. The words Hathaway has written over and over say it all...

LOOK TO  
YOUR ASS

The Gestalt moment arrives at last.

*...Which brings me to this morning's session with Sidney Hathaway.*

"You're smiling."

Hathaway's observation surprised me. I considered touching my lips to examine if the smile was really there. Instead, I giggled like a little kid.

"Share with me, Samuel."

I couldn't wipe the shit eating grin from my face.

"I saw it in your note pad, doctor. It was as clear as if Renoir had painted it himself. The ol' anal retentiveness was my brain game, my need to keep all this rage bottled inside like so much shit until I was ready to bust, just like in my dream. But a man has got to consider his own ass if he's going to survive, right? So I drove to the cemetery last night. No one was there, but the caretaker let me in. I walked up the small knoll to where my father is buried. I sat there for maybe an hour. Then, as I prepared to leave, I turned around and did what I've wanted to do since the day he died. I pissed on his grave!

Hathaway stepped from behind his desk. He stood before me with arms folded like a cross parent. I couldn't determine if the man was annoyed with me. I hoped he wasn't, but I didn't much care if he was.

"And pissing on your father's grave made you feel ...?"

The question had become tiresome. I couldn't contain myself from laughing out loud and I got to my feet, shouting into Hathaway's face.

“You want to know how it made me feel? I feel great! For the first time in my life I’m doing exactly what I want to do. I’m doing what I need to do!”

Hathaway didn’t flinch. He didn’t react at all.

Doctor, I’ve never felt more certain about anything, never more honest with my feelings or more clear. Hell, I’m going back to the cemetery right after our session to piss on the old man’s headstone again, this time in broad daylight! Tonight Aaron will be out of town and I just may fuck his wife!”

The doctor’s frown spread like dripping cheese.

“So this is what you learn from our sessions together? This is how you respond to your father and brother’s influence on your life?”

“No brain games here, doctor. I’m doing what I want. I’m saying what I want. To my father. To Aaron. To you. To the whole goddamned world! I’m saving my own ass!”

Dr. Hathaway stepped toward me, and for a moment I believed he was going to deliver a haymaker across my chops and send me reeling, half conscious, back to the black vinyl couch.

Instead, the therapist smiled. His eyes sparkled and he embraced me.

He was laughing too. I could feel his body shake in rapid heaves against mine as if I were caught in the squeeze of a giant elf.

“Truth,” he whispered to me. “That’s what this is about, Samuel. That’s what everything is about. Eliminate all the intellectual pontifications and truth is all that remains. Bitter pill, hard-to-swallow, indestructible and undeniable truth, just as I’ve been telling you all along. No need to search for it because it’s always right there, the one unalterable truism that defines the very essence of who you are. You have only to discover it to set yourself free. To hell with those who don’t see it like you do!”

“To hell with them! To hell with all of them!” I echoed.

Another Gestalt moment. Popeye’s can of spinach and all the rest. Suddenly, the doctor’s note pad scribbles made perfect sense. Suddenly, everything did.

The truth came at me like a lightning bolt from God himself aimed directly for my frontal lobe.

Because Sidney Hathaway’s hands were on my ass.

# Marianne, Where Are You at Midnight

JOHN GREY

we're on a mission the midnight tells me  
it says time will grow old in my bones  
if I don't get drunk and flash  
annoying like busted neon  
and ride the ass of some grey-suited stranger  
peeling the layers of his "real job"  
like an onion  
or the biker boys who think they can load up  
the highway like a weapon  
and pull its trigger just when  
it gets to the pretty part  
or the straightlaced vicar's daughter  
who's only in this bar on a dare  
and sits stiff and awkward like she's  
the stool's siamese twin  
with a thermostat dipping somewhere  
down about her knees  
who's never had a real man  
who doesn't know why whores are so protective  
of their pocket books  
or even worse the ones who aren't here  
who aren't gulping down tequila  
while knocking in the seven ball  
grabbing their own crotch like it's  
a dog that's trying to get away  
the ones who I'd love nothing better than to whisper  
in their tattooed ear how one day I saw  
a man shot in the head and his skull  
exploded like a watermelon and a piece  
of his brain wrapped around my nose  
like snot and I left it hanging there  
until the cops came and asked me what I saw  
and I said nothing for the longest time  
and death hasn't taken back its calling card  
and I've been betrayed and fucked up  
and cruel once I got the hang of it  
and it's a pity a real pity if on  
any given night I don't get blind drunk  
and ride the elevator to the penthouse  
screaming the names of the absent so loud  
the walls flap like road signs in a sandstorm  
if I don't rush out to the balcony  
make like I'm about to jump  
but instead give thanks to the city beneath me  
for having me here  
and then piss over its railing  
like night does stars

( )

JONATHON HAYES

(blak) flies  
flies

(sworm)

(frum) (red) (chil-ee) (spanish) sky

(ay) (li-bid-i-nal) (feest)

(uv) (stik-ee) (hot)

thighs

thighs

(laying) (lawng) (ded)

(in) (thi) (oh-ver-grohn) (gahr-den)

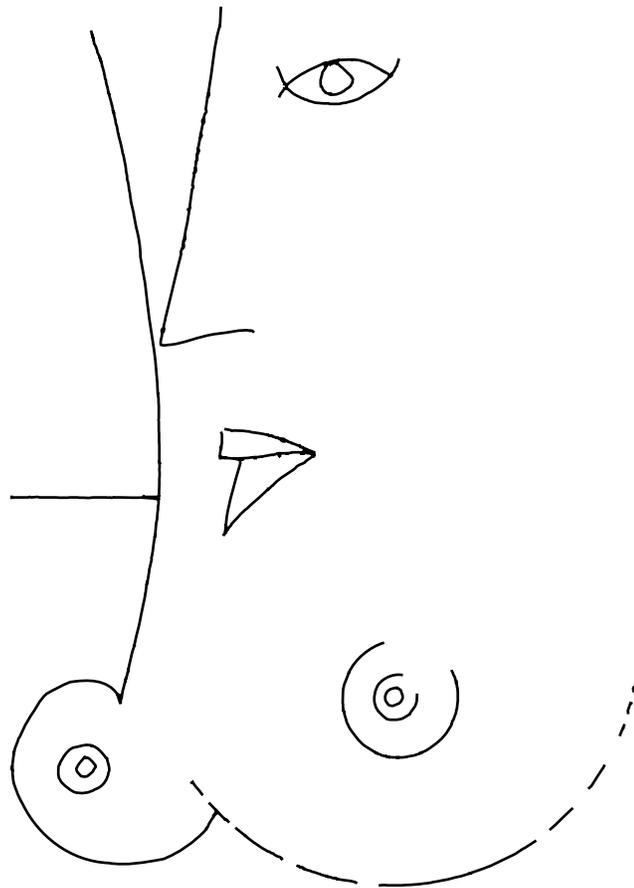
(uv) (mI) (sun-flow-er) (brayn)

(thair) (iz) (noh) (em-pa-thee)

(in) (nay-chur)

(eet)

(or) (bee) eaten



WALT PHILLIPS

# Cigar Smoke

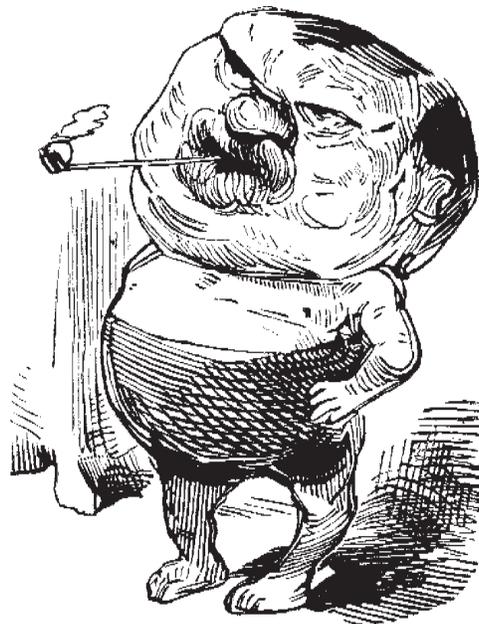
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DOUG HOLDER

I walked through the swirling door of cigar smoke  
to a group of walrus uncles  
their mustaches drooping  
nicotine stained avuncular pelts  
the flabby shudders of laughter  
shaking their vests  
bouncing off the walls.

The red tips of the cigars  
formed an informal circle  
a glowing, nefarious cabal  
through the tobacco scented mist.

They held shot glasses  
moving the shafts  
in and out of their mouths  
in a genteel fellatio.



# The Summer I Was Sixteen

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

Strange.

Lying in my bed in Charlotte, North Carolina  
listening to a middle-aged traveling salesman tell dirty jokes  
till I drifted into a troubled sleep.

I was sixteen, out in the world, thirty miles from home.

I'd had to get away, had to change things.

So this is what I'd done:

taken a civil service job in Charlotte filing records eight hours  
a day,

living in a rooming house, on my own.

It was summer. I wasn't going back to school that fall.

She wouldn't be there; that was all over. She was gone.

But I wasn't going back anyway.

I was going out into the world and doing something, something big.

But what I did was file forms from eight to five every day,

then eat supper and walk the streets till bedtime,

lonely, homesick for a home I didn't even want to return to,

and watch people – at work, in the cafes, on the streets –

trying to understand what they were doing,

what was going on inside them.

The war was on, World War II,

the buses going home weekends crowded with GIs,

headed home or headed back, young – almost as young as I was –

but separate, set aside by what was in store for them

or what they'd already witnessed.

Packed bodies in smoky air, leaning, rocking

while the Friday evening dark grew

and the lights came-on in passing towns.

Debarking, a stranger, into the familiar scene,

separated from this place, my family, by the passage of time.

And more... by all the things that had happened that year

that I couldn't share with anyone...

Perhaps that was it.

I'd left home because it wasn't home anymore,

because it didn't contain me:

there was no place for what I'd become,

no answer there to what I'd experienced.

But what made it bad was that I didn't know if there were answers  
anywhere,

if the questions (which I had yet to formulate) was/were even  
answerable

or, for that matter, if asking them were even permissible.

I'd come to sense a danger around me

as though the mere asking of the wrong question might earn me  
banishment forever.

So, as a consequence of all this, I'd walled myself in

while I considered what to do – next.

I felt out of control but hid the fact as best I could,

not certain if being that way was acceptable either.

And there was certainly no one to ask.

Shame.

Where did it all come from?

It riddled my life – a subject too shameful to bring up.

So I buried it along with everything else.

Shame of what?

Of my very existence –

more specifically of loving a little blonde 20 year-old school-  
teacher

and of the desires aroused in me.

Well, that was done. She was gone – nine months after she came.

Only the turmoil remained – and the change.

For better or worse, I was changed.

Moving like a stranger through the house weekends,  
too lonely not to come home, dissatisfied when I got there.

There was no place for me in this world.

And that other world, glimpsed through a bright haze

when I saw her or thought of her –

as I'd done constantly for nine months till it was all agony –  
that world, like her, was unattainable.

Finally when I couldn't stand it any longer,

I'd gone to work in the cotton mill nights after school,

dulled all sensation in weariness, slept through my classes,

watched the stars from the platform of the mill at night,

dreaming in spite of myself but without hope.

And never once saying a word to her –

too young, too foolish, too ashamed.

And then, with the school year ended, she'd left not to return.

And, unable to bear this final abandonment, I'd left too.

If I laughed, he told another joke.

If I didn't laugh, he told another.

Chubby-faced, an elfin, obscene look about him,

he reduced it all to elementals,

shaved at the mirror with suspenders dangling,

grinning at himself, pink flesh shiny, gross. I told him nothing.

I wondered if there really were men and women like that – the ones  
in his jokes.

His mind was like the drawings on the walls of the bus station

Men's Room.

Was I supposed to learn to be like this?

I didn't understand.

And the days stretched endlessly in that huge room

with its row upon row of grey metal cabinets.

I couldn't believe that I was supposed to do just that – file,

but if I did any more or any less, I was corrected.

I was very shy. I didn't make friends. Everyone was older.

I liked the cafes at night, coffee, strange faces,

voices, the low Carolina drawl, casual conversations trailing off  
into silence,

walking home at night with, high above the dark buildings,

clear summer stars bursting with light

and promises, promises...



# Truman Spoke His Mind

JOHN CANTEY KNIGHT

A haberdasher was President  
that year I was born, '48. Missouri's  
"Show Me" showed the U.S.A.  
heartland stock, plains' virtue:  
Truman was elected our president.  
Named aptly, none since have been.  
He handled mules and generals  
with a farmer's common sense,  
the gee and haw holding straight.  
Evenhanded as Ecclesiastes,  
he rebuilt Japan and Germany,  
and from rubble raised up friends.  
He didn't give a tinker's damn  
for the powers of big business  
and union labor, or the Russian bear.  
He stood for the common man:  
good sense, fairness, and charity  
coursed through Harry's blood.  
The toughness of world decisions  
didn't awe him from the duty  
that twice opened the Earth  
to sky in twisting whirlwinds,  
gapping hell from ground zero.  
He didn't even think or care  
that they'd have done worse to us.  
The only time he lost his temper  
was when the reporters reminded him  
that his daughter couldn't play piano:  
Truman damn well spoke his mind.  
Red-hot in anger, he was right.  
There are lines drawn in dirt  
that had best not be trifled with.

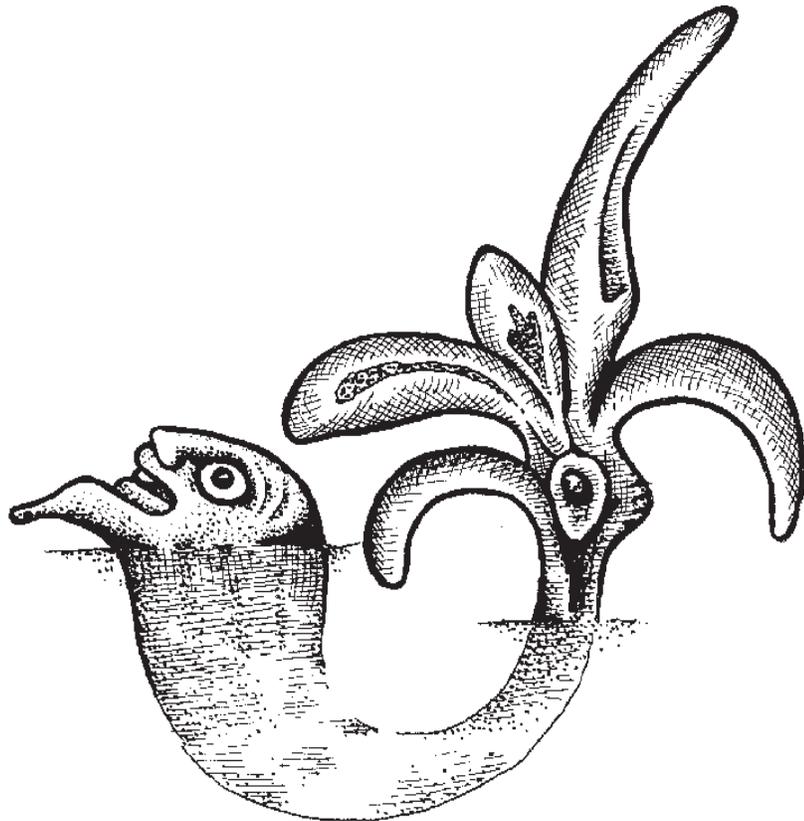
# perhaps it's why we still read edgar allen poe

GERALD LOCKLIN

there is a theory now called "hypersea"  
in which we all are linked by inner fluids,  
at one with animals, plants, and (especially) fungi,  
and have been since before the druids.

it's why life, which began in h<sub>2</sub>o,  
has flourished on terra firma. the ocean  
flows within both host and parasite:  
we feed through straws we plunge into the night.

and one day, drawn back to our origins,  
transformed, perhaps, to floating mangrove isles,  
our cups will be uncracked to virginal,  
far from athenian peristyles.



# The Cyberclone Sex

PETER MAGLIOCCO

*(eins)*

Say again? Boot-up: Distracting monitor glare. The software inside you...

Calling up the mirror-menu, the square table experts decide to create a new document for Edsell. One that will further program “me” for a unique activity, namely reconstructive cloning of his evolutionary self.

“It’s hard being half-human, half-cyberdude,” the “I”-Edsell complains before the session. “I’m a legitimate Human Being, product of a biological nature you guys are seeking to de- humanize.”

“Do you really believe that?” responds Kepler, studying some x-rays. “You’re bitching still and we haven’t impaired that ability. If anything, we’re seeking to empower your brain potential, not shackle it. It boils down to a matter of viewpoint, Edsell. Is the glass of water half-empty, or half-full?”

“Yeah, right.”

*(zwei)*

Name of Document: *All History is an Ongoing Revisionism. (This data charts the ongoing evolution of Adam Edsell, science’s so-called Hyperspace Clone.)*

“You knew the risks,” Kepler admonishes. “You’re no different than an astronaut in training.”

So what?

He can’t read my thoughts – not yet, not completely. Ol’ Lovey Kepler is a virtual scientific nerd verging on – what? Banality or even more dangerous banality ... Somewhere within I’m having an allergenic reaction to all the chips and gizmos implanted inside me, but Lovey says it’s all in my once proverbial mind, which is being re-cloned with J.F.K.’s brain tissue. I’m seeing the New Frontier!

*(drei)*

Flickering fluorescent radiance. The day one’s x-ray vision became amber. In a long night of eternal re-formatting.

Is that what the afterlife’s like. Or is this it?

*(vier)*

Lovey, in the hermetically sealed lab, goes on about how much trust’s been given Adam. Yet unquestionably that trust’s been abused more often than not.

“I just want to be myself. I want to interact naturally with people again.”

“You’re a highly classified federal project, Adam. You know that. You’re as sensitive as the Manhattan Project once was. I can’t have you blowing the secret, even if people think you’re just another unbalanced dweeb lost in the big city. Don’t tell me you’re not yourself

– you’re in the process of *finding* your ultimate and real *Selfhood*.”

“Bull feces.”

But it doesn’t hurt. Not any more. Having gone beyond the pain of physical disequilibrium. The body so overloaded with interacting paregorics, having altered nerve ends sends ambiguous messages to and from the brain now. More oceans of a sometimes blissfully waking sleep, with the edges of consciousness blurred like colors running in a watercolor. But no one else sees as I do, senses the upgraded feelings that make the ordinary human’s seem primordial – even obsolete. Left to wander perfectly now in an imperfect landscape, with the only home being a soulless lab where my every impulse is measured, analyzed, and stored as data in their giant, blinking hardware. There’s an invisible umbilical cord between me and them I’d like to truncate. Images of reverse emasculation becoming particularly vivid. Do I now have a silicone penis? Or one cloned from John Wayne Bobbit’s...

*(fünf)*

I can’t take the latest experimental time-filler. Being subjected to watching endless American television is bringing near-blindness. Why must one sit through every failed sit-com pilot and failed series ever to appear via that hapless medium? Pain like vermilion roses exploding mercilessly on the once remembered psyche.

“They’re all only comedies, Adam, for god’s sake. We thought they’d amuse you somehow, the way children are by cartoons.”

“I’d rather see some cartoons, Kepler, if they’re any good.”

*Life* made an endless *Death* – in twenty-five words or less appears an impossibility. But the 21st Century is an era of making the impossible a standardized possibility more plausible. Watching the electric cars scoot by before their collision with man-made barriers.

*Is it possible to embrace Dionysus – to traipse barefoot over a tarred macadam and somehow feel grass underfoot, thanks to some highly techno-transpositions.*

*(Or transmutations?)*

“Isn’t there something you can do for me, Kepler? I feel the hardware ticking like a sad eternity inside.”

“It won’t blow up in your face, Adam. We really don’t want to lose you.” Kepler, smirking through yet more cigarette haze, his brow more mottled than dung-spotted sidewalks. “You agreed to celibacy throughout the experiment, yet now you’re acting like a college boy in need of a panties raid.”

(I need intimate human contact of a different sort, Kepler. I require intimate human comfort...)

But seriously, my boy, if it’s a geisha you want ... I’ll try to come up with one. Or your female ‘counterpart’ in the experiment. What the hell. But you understand we’d have to record your every intercourse with her.”

“Fornicate You.”

To let my cybernetic hair down, you jerks, and without your watching and studying my every banal function – !? The Cybernetic Clone is not up. Not soft like Dali’s melting machinery in a distant surreal landscape.

(I need some totemic sanctuary of softness, a pathway to transcending taboos ...)

*(sechs)*

“We’re aware of your disgruntlement, Adam,” Kepler, My Nazi God, informed me one cheerless day. “I’m working on rectifying it somewhat. Trust me.”

Kepler. *My Nazi God*. Sounds like the title of another rejected television sit-com I’ve been forced to watch. *Zounds*: byte. I remain “highly classified,” according to the U.S. government, and – despite all the futuristic brouhaha and trappings connected with this project – I suspect I’m already archaic. (Bleep-no-beep?) So be it. If anything, I’m the regal head of minor, even trivial experiments that seem more interested in fathoming the overlooked little things obfuscating our lives rather than myself, *Cyberclone*. My heaven is an amber monitor, my God a low-level, neo-Nazi functionary (i.e. computer science analyst, heavily degreed) here somewhere underground, from Wyoming to Deutschland to Neverland ...

*What is Time? What is Truth?*

They’re treating me like an inane game show contestant. Calculating the hard drive of my heart.

Yesterday, however, Kepler said “a real experiment” aboveground awaited me. It was still in the planning stage, but Kepler assured me it would be the event of my cybernetic lifetime. I’d be taken to a major city to actually interact with normal people in an everyday street setting! My every movement would be studied throughout this little adventure, and two bodyguards (resembling a pair of dour F.B.I. men, no doubt) would flank me at all times. The thought of actually returning to civilization again brought a wave of excitement over me that, if unchecked, bordered on miasma.

“Kepler. How long have I been underground?”

The doctor only smiled, clucking his tongue. Everything connected with me was a classified secret.

*(sieben)*

The lab experiments couldn’t be more humiliating. I’m doing the things monkeys were once trained to perform in cosmic space. In a way I’m not much different from these remote and primitive ancestors as I bounce blue beachballs endlessly against a styrofoam-like wall, or shimmy rat-like on hands and knees – in total darkness – through narrow corridors of some convoluted labyrinth, where there’s never a beginning or end.

Lovey is killing me in his way, little by little.

Yet life wasn’t much better before The Project. It was, unfortunately, bordering on greater mortality, since my being diagnosed HIV-positive at age 27. No longer capable of anything remotely sexual. Fear lingering around the edges of every thing. (Fear the omnipresent fog before the Megabyte of something darker to come.) My health, strength, willpower deteriorated at too alarming a rate – and, having to quit my job as a telemarketing salesperson, I was propelled into a white-walled giant room of perpetual hospitalization.

And then Kepler came. One day. Lovey himself.

Observing the pitiful state of my prostrate suffering, my willingness to die, Dr. Lovey Kepler leaned over me with a clinical twinkle in his eye. And asked me if I *desired* Life. If

I wanted to keep on living, far from this madding crowd of afflicted AIDS patients.

So I had little choice. Of course I opted for Life, though what Kepler proposed was as equally unthinkable, at first, as Death.

To become part of a new Cyberspecies clone – half-human, half-computer. *Megahuman*, he called it ... On my way. Free from the tyranny of the misguided medical world and its insensitive abuses of unfortunates like myself. Free from the prejudicial, mindless slaughter of the braindead gods of religious conservatism, who saw my illness as proof of the 21st Century's Scarlet Letter. Far from the cruel adversity wanton chance brings.

Of course I wanted it:

*Life without Death.*

*(acht)*

Download this, baby! I can't believe what they have me doing now. I'm actually measuring the balls of lint left in garment pockets after being spun dry in the drying machine.

It's a painstaking, absolutely unnecessary experiment, one I'm far from connected to. I beg Kepler to let me rejoin the rank and file of humanity, to run with the boys again in Dionysian street splendor. Enough of this inane, soul-rapping triviality called "experimentation." I want real life again!

"That's how you got in trouble in the first place," Kepler advises me. "You demanded sensuality above all else." The result was contracting AIDS, Kepler admonished me, lugubriously peering over his steel-rim glasses, his hangdog face never more solemn. Kepler, High Priest of Cyberworld...

"All right," he told me one day, after he finished tuning up my insides. "We're going to send you back to The World temporarily, my friend. We're going to furnish you with a sexual companion and test the results in great detail."

I couldn't believe this. Devious Kepler had to be joking. I could almost picture my Adonis-like love again, with all his bare masculine muscle available to my touch.

It would be the beginning of My Resurrection –

*(neun)*

They've given me a cybercloned hermaphrodite to interact with, cloned from "me". Some pseudo-hermaphrodite...

A creature with neither male nor female sexual gender or characteristics – a robotic being they call *Big Elf* who's as far from androgyny as can be. A giant neuter cloned also from the DNA of Bigfoot (who was finally captured and depilated in the Andes, decades ago) and hi-tech, space-age metals or non-ferrous "plastics" of indestructible capability.

My Other Self!

I can hear Kepler laughing in the hidden background. "I Love You, Adam," Kepler laughs. He means it. His laugh sounds like one from some T.V. sit-com's canned laugh track...

*Cybercloning Your Lover For Greater Spiritual Well-Being* was the name of that old show, cancelled in its first season; and in a hot flash I realize I am *immaterial* – a non-being existing only in the mental cyber-loins of some unknown creator I believe perhaps doesn't really exist.

# Collision Course

---

MICHAEL L. NEWELL

I.

When they pass, it's a collision  
of future and past (but which is which):  
one covered crown to toe, wearing  
a horsehide-veil and long skirt over pants;  
one scarcely covered – skyblue micro-miniskirt,  
bare shoulders and back, auburn  
hair swinging loosely across deep tan,  
neckline plunging nearly as low  
as the hemline rises.

One is Uzbek, one is Russian.  
They don't even glance in passing.  
For one hundred and fifty years, Tashkent  
has been the Russian cultural center  
in Central Asia. Now Uzbeks own  
their land again – Russians leave,  
or stay with an uncertain future.  
Most Uzbeks speak Russian. Few  
Russians speak Uzbek.

A Russian is said to have told an Uzbek,  
“I don't understand your anger. We brought  
you culture. We civilized you.”  
The Uzbek replied, “You taught us  
two things: how to drink, and how  
to fornicate.” With such different perceptions,  
can there be understanding, or (at the very least)  
accommodation? The two women pass without a glance.  
Every month, more veils appear. Russian skirts get shorter.

II.

They grow in numbers: traffic cops  
ceaselessly seeking bribes on corner after corner;  
and greyskinned, ill-dressed, dull-eyed  
drunks with broken blood vessels  
creating patchwork quilts of misery  
across stupefied faces unable,  
or unwilling, to remember how  
they arrived in their current threadbare rags  
in a city they once controlled.

In the new REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN, President  
Islam (consider the implications of such  
a first name for the leader of a prototypical  
Soviet state) Karimov quadruples the size  
of the old police force – making the police  
the largest single source of employment

other than planting and picking cotton (and, you can be sure, the cops' supplemental income is greater than anything available in them old cotton fields).

Consider a leader of Uzbekistan, whose every thought was shared by the old Soviet Empire, whose best language is Russian, whose ancestors include Tajiks, and whose wife is Russian; consider such a man ruling a country whose majority Uzbek population hates Russians, has contempt for Tajiks, and are rediscovering Islam after seventy years of Marxist Leninist rule. Consider: the streets, run by cheap thuggish Uzbek cops; local businesses, controlled by the Mafia; the poor – struggling Uzbek cotton farmers, barely surviving kiosk owners, the homeless.

### III.

“We are on a collision course with history. Here, here is where the past is revered, and will guide us into the future. Businesses from all over the world come to Tashkent because we are the future. We keep one foot in the past to keep us upright as our other foot steps into the twenty-first century. Tradition roots us, vision guides our growth, the resulting tree is one of beauty, of excellence. A tree is my metaphor, because Tashkent is famous as a home for trees.”

Tashkent IS a home for trees. They hide the ugly decaying Soviet-era architecture. They ameliorate the summer heat with green leafy canopies which overarch many streets. They make a dull city into a cool park. And there is tradition here – weddings which summon enough guests to populate a modest-sized town; casual hospitality to a stranger as generous as that displayed by Arabs; art, pottery, music, theatre, dance, poetry, and cuisine – Uzbek, Russian, Tajik, Korean, and Jewish.

But business has no home here save in bazaar and kiosk. Yes, businesses do come to Tashkent from all over the world – to be punitively taxed, to have their hard currency frozen and used by the government with no accounting or repayment, to be denied currency convertibility, to find laws changed weekly, to pay bribes to officials who then change jobs and to be met by new officials with their hands out. The government defaults on loans from the IMF and expresses wonder when multinationals leave. The small farmer toils endlessly to see his profits siphoned off by government ministers.

### IV.

Some metaphors for the future: a Russian girl balancing on high platform shoes, semi-naked in her silvery dress, meeting her Uzbek Mafia boyfriend decked-out in muscle t-shirt and jeans, slipping into his Mercedes, and blasting through a red light where a policeman has a gypsy cab owner pulled over and pulling out documents – none of which pass muster – until (at last) a shaking of hands

exchanges enough currency to let the driver move on;

an eighteen year old Russian waitress trying to sell  
her body to an expatriate three times her age;  
a woman in a horsehide veil working for ten dollars  
a month in a sweatshop to produce cheap versions  
of European clothes; an Uzbek school guard  
saying that he watches CNN for the truth – local  
television tells only lies; the Russian boy who chants,  
“Money Money Give Me Money,” to every passing foreigner;  
the Mayor who wants a million dollar bribe before letting a major

international hotel firm use city land to help upgrade  
a failing hotel – the firm agrees, but wants to pay half  
up front, half on completion – no deal says His Honor; the Mafia leader  
who offers an international school three hundred thousand dollars  
to help it afford new facilities – after all, his son  
attends the school and is failing; the Uzbek wedding party  
which welcomes any passing stranger, who feeds and fetes him  
like he was a prodigal son returned; and the Uzbek father and son,  
fifth and sixth generation ceramicists, who work in styles two thousand years old.



**PARKING LOT: 1ST-EVER INTERNATIONAL TATTOO CONVENTION,  
MOSCOW 1995 BY CHRISTOPHER M.**

# Be My Friend!

---

MICHAEL L. NEWELL

Money Money Give Me  
Money chants the pale  
Russian kid to my disappearing  
round the corner back.

He looks like his mother  
and her brother loved  
each other very well  
and he's the residue,

pale ash bobbing up  
and down in a spring breeze.  
His mind is a screen door,  
sprung permanently open,

and words fall out  
his mouth to litter  
courtyard, hallway,  
and staircase.

He's the building's voice,  
its anointed crazy, spewing  
all the garbage his neighbors  
can't bring themselves to say.

Hey, USA, Give Me,  
Give Me, Give Me,  
MONEY MONEY, YOU  
Got Money. Be My Friend!

(Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1998)

# Just Outside 23 Ulitsa Chekhova

MICHAEL L. NEWELL

The short sturdy crone with a limp,  
dressed in dusty colorful Uzbek peasant garb, furiously  
whisks her morning broom across sidewalks

and gutters – leaves, twigs, and dirt  
lifting into the breeze and faces  
of pedestrians scooting past. She stops

to exchange laughing shouted pleasantries  
with the old man across the street  
who has been (somewhat more sedately) sweeping

away the debris of the previous day. She scowls  
at people in her path and resumes  
her scuffle with existence and all

its shabby frayed dusty manifestations. She is  
equipped with grim determination and flailing arms.  
She will make this day, and this place, liveable.

(Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1997)



SCOURING,  
MOSCOW 1995 BY CHRISTOPHER M.

# Dining Out

---

B.Z. NIDITCH

Characters: A: ALICE GLASS  
B: BETTY GADARENES  
C: CHINA CASHMERE  
D: DELMORE DIVES  
W: WAITER

Setting: A RESTAURANT; FOUR CHAIRS

A: He doesn't know if I'm a man or a woman.  
B: Curiosity may kill me.  
C: No one would believe I fell into a manhole.  
D: I've been downsized but that's not what is my best assignment.  
A: If I put on my boa and lipstick...  
B: That's a woman!  
A: No, I will put on my sailor's cap.  
B: A guy, after all.  
C: Don't knock it; I was knocked up.  
D: They think they can downsize me.  
A: I've got more in my feet than giving them any head.  
B: It's in the feet that one can tell the biggest secret...  
C: Being in a manhole for a moment is killing me.  
D: Get out of yourself; at least you have a job.  
A: I do any jobs, any times.  
B: I guess he or she is really a whore.  
D: Anyone in labor or runaway capital who hasn't sold out is a whore anyway.  
B: I write for a living, but nothing is right.  
C: They took away my rights.  
D: Don't tell me about injustice collecting; my company is not wanted.  
C: You're pretty cute.  
D: I'm only slightly over thirty.  
C: Who cares; you can't slight me.  
D: I didn't intend to; so you fell in a manhole?  
C: It wasn't that bad; but it was dark. Have a light.  
D: I've gone back to smoking one Havana a night after my Cuban lover left me. I wasn't in favor of any revolutionary situation and my lover was committed. Then one day they packed her up and committed my lover. And my lover was a Leftist.  
A: It's all street theatre, don't you know. If you had a silver cane you'd be looked up too, but because you're down and out you're just a curiosity.  
D: I was able to do anything; I believed in myself.

B: Curiosity begins with the gonads.

C: I wonder; are you a gonad?

B: I'm Betty Gadarenes.

A: No one wants me to introduce myself. Well, I'll make my own introduction; I'm Alice Glass but some of the time I'm Alan Glassblown.

C: I'm China Cashmere today; my stage name. I shoot up.

D: I'm Delmore Dives; I feel like shooting myself.

B: What a menagerie, a zoocracy, and I just came in to have filet of sole.

A: You seem to be a fish of some kind; your mouth is always open. You must be a barracuda.

B: At least I had a soul in another life; I'm a barracuda in this one--no teeth; all gums.

D: You call this a life? One day you are respected and respectable, then you are nothing.

C: It's better to be cheap than nothing.

B: I own a curiosity shop.

A: You're just a curiosity, an item to be bought and then consumed.

B: Then consume me, Alice Glass or Alan Glassblown.

D: I wanted to be a regular guy, normal, a straight shooter, but the world wouldn't give even me a chance. I was on management's side; I managed my own way but I got in the way of those profits.

B: I am a prophet. I can tell that your past is present and your future is over except if you get into a different field.

A: Why don't you play the field?

C: You don't want me to be your heroine, Delmore, because I take heroin. You're even ashamed to be with me because I shoot up.

D: I feel like shooting everyone in the office who downsized me, who made me feel like small change.

A: So exchange your identify, put on a dress; change your address.

D: You think it's easy at my age?

A: You feel like you felt when you fashioned yourself in your own fashion.

D: You think by changing myself I can change my situation.

A: You're full of yourself.

B: You don't want to expose yourself or to even pose for us; you're uptight. You need to get high.

C: He's no highbrow.

D: I didn't even order my lunch.

B: Throw it up; it all tastes like rabbit food.

C: I like it natural. Even when I was in the manhole, I felt natural.

A: I know what you mean.

C: You're mean enough for anybody. I was given antibodies but they didn't work; I tried to sue the company who left the manhole open. Then I spent the week shooting up. You think I'm a loser, don't you, all of you?

D: So am I, if you really get down to it; they downsize everything today; even God.

A: I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a nun or an altar boy and I wasn't even Catholic.

C: Why don't you make up your mind what you are or who you are? Put up some make-up or take it off but stop trying to take it out on us.

B: I hate eating alone. For all I know this could be my last supper.

A: My mother was into martyrdom. Me, I just wanted my freedom. No miracle for my kind. I once made it with a preacher; made out well.

B: Hell, did he think you were only a woman?

C: Stop putting down Alice; she's been through hell.

A: What do you know about it lady Curiosity?

B: We come in alone and we'll leave alone.

A: A laugh, a good time, a snatch, and then it's death.

D: I've been thinking about death when I was put down by the company. I hate the world today, present company excluded.

A: You lived it up. if you saw me homeless would you take me home?

D: What makes you think I won't?

A: I can tell your type.

D: By my blood?

A: Blue blood.

C: None of you are cracked up to be what you are. I took crack tonight, and I'm crackers, though I feel so together being here. That's why I'm so relaxed.

B: Superiority can kill as well as curiosity.

A: I have no animosity toward any of you; I love everybody. I adore every one of you and I'm the most adorable.

B: Says who?

A: Why don't anyone serve us?

B: Don't you know where we are?

C: Hell, where are we?

D: Dammit, the pills never worked.

C: They never do.

(A. starts banging plates.)

A: I want service!

C: Just because you service others doesn't mean we get served.

D: I was going to play tennis today - love.

B: I lost my appetite.

A: I'm hungry for affection; I can't live by bread alone, I need a fish.

C: No one would believe I fell into a manhole.

B: You never got out.

C: I came out to all of you; I came out to eat.

B: You're eating us out.

D: Someone is skinning us alive; I want to play ball.

C: Balls.

B: I can't look at food or people.

D: I need a Havana.

C: My life is going up in smoke.

B: Life is pollution.

A: I'm starving for affection.

D: I could use a tennis partner.

A: You have one.  
C: I see the waiters; at least they are wearing white.  
D: I need my white shorts, my white tennis shoes.  
A: I will put on my lipstick and boa.  
D: Does that make you a woman?  
A: I will put on my sailor's hat.  
D: I am someone.  
C: Even here I knew I fell into a manhole.  
B: I thought I was a prophet, but how did I know that when I entered a restaurant to eat I would not be able to?  
C: At least we have each other.  
D: Do we? No one wants to make the first move.  
A: I will, if you will have me.  
B: We can have each other for the asking, that is.  
C: Here are the waiters...  
W: Can I take your order?  
C: You may. I'll have a drink.  
W: Don't you have a preference?  
C: I'd frankly like to get drunk for I've been through a manhole...  
D: Getting out of your cover is not easy. Waiter, get me a scotch and soda.  
A: I'll have pink champagne.  
B: I'd like my filet of sole with some white wine.

# Dear Shadow

---

MATHER SCHNEIDER

Dear Shadow,

I am broke again, my friend. Being broke tends to make you do things you would never, in all good sense, attempt. Cooking in your own kitchen, for example. Not only have I been forced to do my own cooking, but because I have no money for groceries I have only what my meager kitchen provides with which to fashion a meal.

It has been a learning experience, let me tell you. Last night I had a sweet tooth, and decided to make cookies. Only problem was I had no eggs or butter. I figured I could substitute Crisco for butter, and mayonnaise for eggs. That's all mayonnaise is, right, eggs? Well, the results are too gruesome to get into, just take my word for it, eggs are important.

Today for lunch I made some pasta. I only had a half dozen sticks of fettucini noodles in a smashed box, but I made do. I figured I needed a sauce of some kind to stretch it a little, but I had used all the mayonnaise for the cookies. I found a jar of bar-b-cue sauce in the door of the fridge. After I pried the lid off with a screwdriver, I doused the tiny nest of noodles with the remains. While writing this letter, I have been belching up an aroma and a flavor that would make your eyes water. I failed again.

It is not easy, but I am alive! There is not much left to choose for dinner. I believe I have an end piece of bread, some lemonade crystals and some black pepper. When they tell you that cooking is only a matter of creativity and imagination, they are wrong. In order to make good food, you must have one, very important ingredient: groceries.

As if all this wasn't enough, a water main broke in our apartment complex and I don't have any water. I am down to my last 2 ice cubes, which I'm saving for a special occasion.

I am simply too weak to write any more. Luck to you, and if you can find it in your heart, send me a Cheerio or something.

Your friend,

Andy Lambent

# Crazy Here

---

MARK SENKUS

we are all quite crazy here  
we jack-off in the sunlight  
and piss in the rain  
just the other day  
a gal down the hall tried  
to murder herself  
and the mental health people  
came for her  
another one hears gunshots  
on a regular basis  
she calls her sister to  
tell her of the gunshots  
the sister hangs up on her  
(there are never any shots)

last week  
some drunk sounded like  
death overtop his  
toilet bowl  
the gagging and splashing  
of vomit  
going on with much bravado  
through the apartment  
building hallway

we are all quite crazy here  
even the landlady  
seems to  
understand and  
forgive

we grab the moon and break  
its glow with spit  
we twist the fingers of night  
and sleep upon the noise  
of idiots in gathering

somehow  
there is a kind of peace here  
there is a routine here  
and comfort comes in not being  
used to comfort  
and the nights come  
having had too much from the  
days  
and we walk by each other  
without looking to close  
sometimes saying hello  
but most times just walking by  
like we hardly live here at all.

# Greed

---

CHRIS WATERS

I

Over our dark aerie, treading the thin rooftop,  
the footsteps. As so often, Ma was out, this time  
delivering, on Christmas Eve, card orders to surely  
fuming customers. Times were tense. If they refused,  
she had no refund money left. Unlike the cottage,  
the attic had electricity, although, unattended,  
I couldn't use the lights; we were on the landlord's meter.  
Aloud, shakily, I promised Santa I'd pretend  
to find the 50-cent piece Ma was missing.

II

Longueuil, snugly, warmly, irrigating the sheets still.  
From elevenses to midnight, bilingual droning Bingo.  
Ma the resort's secretary. The summer of Joe Louis.  
Frank, pencil-mustached concessionaire, soothing,  
depending on their language, bathers on whose ankles hung  
the Saint Lawrence River's loving sangsues or leeches.  
With K stamped on the cap cork, the stall's soda-buyers got  
a whole case free. On vacation, they seldom checked it out.  
Each week, for the resort, Frank earned a case or two.  
The day he asked me to replace him for awhile, I pocketed  
a lucky cap. Some time later, I announced my boardwalk find.  
Mustache twitching, he counted out the wholesale worth.

III

Halloween. The kind lady loaned me and Moon Mullins  
the clown and pirate costumes of her grown children.  
Moon and I pacted to split anything we won.  
At the parade's end, the way we were both beamed at  
by the judges told us we were firsts. Moon pointed out  
my cake was bigger, but I said a cake's a cake.  
Two years later, for the day, Gus and I forsook  
bush-crawling at Lovers' Lane for crabbing. Again,  
I netted more and welshed on our agreement.  
Moon and Gus forget. Lenders, and the guilty, remember.

IV

Touch is the only sense, the root of all the others.  
Closing in on a 100, Auntie I says the sin of all sins  
is selfishness. A better name is greed.  
People, aging, preparing for ultimate baggagelessness,  
want less, improve. Guilt never leaves, ever remindful  
of almost getting caught cheating at the board game,  
neglecting to thank the cousin who gave me the lovely book-  
or the lady who loaned the clown costume. Indeed,  
nearly every harm is born in greed. Anger, even, and, while  
less controllable, less intentional, its memory festers worst.  
Close to 90, but leukemia setting in, Ma made one  
of her usual remarks. I bridled, stormed, slammed out,  
came back at once. She was sobbing. Three months later,  
alone, she died.

# Powerless

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TIMOTHY D. WELCH

Last night the power went out and clocks died in a blinking fit,  
convulsing without end, while the milk turned sour and all the ice

melted into a collective mess born out of the part of itself  
it so desperately wants to become, where it should feel most safe

and real, as a puddle on the floor. And the moths in their nightly ritual  
went their separate ways into those fearful shadows, a step beyond

the porch now smothered in thick nothingness. The TV  
found itself speechless, and of course remembered little of the incident

like the coffee machine and the bread maker full of yeast and bubbles,  
mixing a drunken concoction like a baker coming home late from the pub.

My alarm shimmered all too innocently of abilities beyond its control  
and the ansaphone caught amnesia in total shock. Did she call or didn't

she? I'll never know and he'll never say. So I light a candle,  
not only for light but for darkness, and for the traveling cloud of muggers

that descend like locusts on city blocks, indiscriminate and thirsty  
for whirring electrons. And the only thing they leave behind to let us

know of their presence is the complaints of our things, like their dignities  
were stolen in a flash of night, hit over the head with a club in a dark

alley, tied to walls and strung together like gagged hostages, murmuring  
something religious, something pure as lightning.

# Adorn

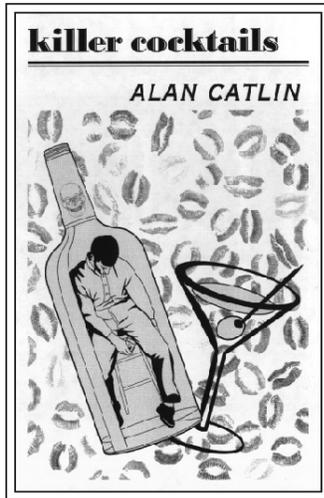
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TIMOTHY D. WELCH

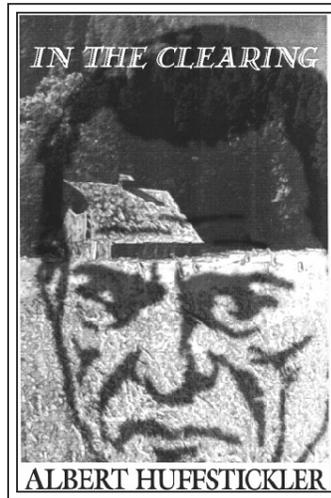
You wear the shirt I loaned you more than the shirt I bought  
you & like the wolf you eat the sheep before you wear his wool  
sweater. So wear the clothes and pay attention to fashion, the in  
& the out of the vogue fence as the cats walk in style. We evolved into  
skin and then into cocktail dresses that evolved out of both  
its cock and tail. Ronald Reagan, a true clothes horse, wore plaid  
to a press conference while cold warriors, cold enough to don  
Russian fur, marched like a regiment of grizzly bears with white eyes  
in terror. The daily miracle of rebirth begins with  
rummaging: yellow pullover, teal cardigan, high-water khaki,  
pin-stripe blazer, my mother always preferred lace; enter Freud  
in tweed. We die in style but I'm sure eternity has designers  
of his own. My lover, stripped of red lace & spaghetti strap,  
slips on my green boxers to greet a Brownie selling Thin Mint  
girl scout cookies in uniform army stationed coolly at  
the front door. Glamour advice tastes sweeter: avoid  
wife-beater attire at all cost because clothes make the memory.  
Dress light for picnic in the park but heavy, like Hernando De Soto,  
when ravaging the natives for gold, a good color. The ocean  
is forever naked so don't let that fool you, wax on Coppertone  
SPF 30 at the beach; & when it comes to bathing suits  
the world is your oyster & to the oyster the world is himself



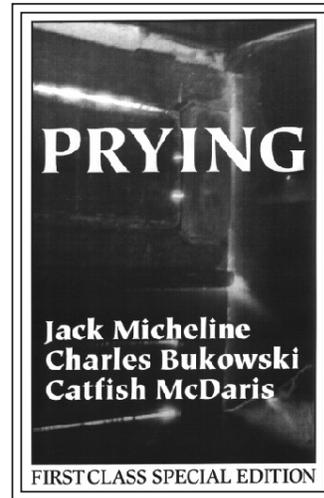
ALSO AVAILABLE FROM FOUR-SEP PUBLICATIONS



**KILLER COCKTAILS** is the latest collection of poetics by the well-known Alan Catlin. Each piece in this collection of thirty is a portrayal of a character or event inspired by a particular cocktail. Persona and event become imbibables.....Fully worth the \$4ppd./offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp/FS#104



**IN THE CLEARING** is a wandering collection which merges into a fragmented cohesion. Disturbing and fearsome, yet the most brutal aspect of this journal of poetics is the impact of frank self-examination. Albert Huffstickler is one of the best, period....\$4ppd./offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp/FS#105

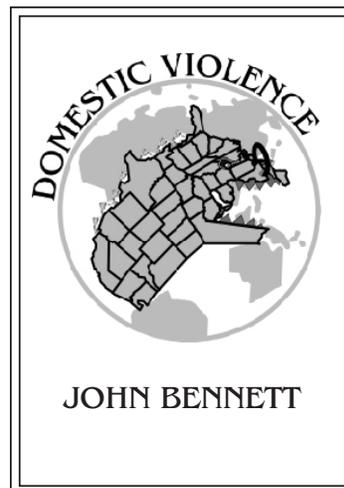


**PRYING** is a special edition of First Class featuring the words of Jack Micheline, Charles Bukowski (unpubbed), and Catfish McDaris as well as images by Sinisa Dugonic (Belgrade), Jouni Vaara-kangas (Finland), Carlos Serpas (Mexico), and Mike Tolento (USA)....\$5ppd./glossy cover/bamboo paper/28pp/FS#103.

- **FREEDOM FIVE** by *Slim Bitters*
- Short work chronicling the adventures of one man's devious, spontaneous pursuit of norm abandonment.
- A tale that skids from the high road to the public washroom. FS#101/mini-chap/26pp/\$1
- **I THINK** by *Cat Sobaka*
- Short collection of sporadic bursts of opinion. "Humorous, insightful, weird..."-M.P., Minneapolis. FS#102/mini-chap/14pp/\$1
- **FIRST CLASS #1-#3**
- Still available for \$2@ or all three for \$5
- **FIRST CLASS #4**
- Chock full of exceptional words and photos.
- Half-legal/48pp/\$3
- **FIRST CLASS #5, #6, #7, #8**
- There are still a few issue of these 46-52pp/full-size/hand-bound blockbusters, featuring eighteen(#5) and sixteen(#6) humans and their best words. \$5@ ppd. or \$3@ with another publication to keep the printshop happy.

**NEW! NEW! NEW! NEW!**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE** is a new collection of John Bennett's finely honed style of 'shard writing': stripped away convention beating like a pulpy red heart. This is the very sharpest cutting edge of his talent, and is a most eloquent assault on post-modern sensibilities...\$8ppd./perfect bound/finest quality offset multi-color cover/72pp/FS#106



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 am now also very interested in illustrations and *some* stark photography for both cover art and internal pages. I seek the very best words and images 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.

**)ISM**( an organization dedicated to contemporary writers and the independent presses that publish them: The first issue was a short one, but D. Michael McNamara and company have an excellent idea that will hopefully bear much ripe fruit. Basically a showcase for people like you and me. Info and correspondence: 1514 16th Avenue

**'TRY THESE' CONTINUES ON PAGE 56**

# CONTRIBUTORS

**JOHN BENNETT** – His sixth 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 52).

**DOUG BOLLING** – First time in these pages, he lives in Jacksonville, Illinois, and has work forthcoming in several small press mags.

**RANDY BOONE** – First-timer from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, who teaches freshman composition and developmental composition at two schools and survives on Caesar salads and Count Chocula cereal.

**SUSANNE R. BOWERS** – Second time here. She lives in Houston, Texas, and was a finalist for the Academy Arts Press 1997 National Short Fiction Competition. Many publishing credits, with her collection “The Space We Leave Between” published by Touchstone Press.

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

**DAVE CHURCH** – First time on these pages, though well-known in the small press. Known in Rhode Island as the “Bad Boy of Providence Poetry”.

**GARY EVERY** – Fourth appearance in First Class, based in Oracle, Arizona. Spends his working hours with the ultra-rich, and his better time dropping words on paper.

**KENNETH C. GOLDMAN** – Crosses over to his first appearance in First Class from the land of horror and genre writing. He has won or been nominated for a heap of awards, and has been published extensively in the small and semipro genre press. Utilizes his MA in Guidance Psychology in the terribly troubled town of Bensalem, Pennsylvania.

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

**JONATHON HAYES** – First time here. He calls Berkeley, California home. His chap “Echoes From the Sarcophagus” is available from 3300 Press. Also responsible for the mag “Over the Transom” write: pobox 423528, San Francisco, California 94142.

**DOUG HOLDER** – Appears in several poetic mags, first time here. Has a strange connection to the Regal Bostonian Hotel, or a stationary fetish. Calls Boston, Massachusetts home.

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

# CONTRIBUTORS

**JOHN CANTEY KNIGHT** – Creeping out of the bayou in the surrounding area of New Orleans (Metairie) is his first appearance in FC. Has appeared in many, many journals, including Libido and was the recipient of two Amelia Magazine poetic awards.

**GERALD LOCKLIN** - Long time, far-reaching presence, with an abundance of publishing credits. Go to the library and reference “Contemporary Writers” for his biblio. Better yet, send \$5 each for the two-volume comprehensive biblio by Mark Weber (725 Van Buren Place SE, Albuquerque, NM 87108). Teaches at CSU-Long Beach and has even lectured in Cuba on Hemingway.

**PETER MAGLIOCCO** – Live from the sweaty streets of Sin City, this is his first appearance in the First Class lounge. A forgiving soul, with volumes of great material.

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

**MICHAEL L. NEWELL** - Currently residing in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, this is his first appearance in First Class. He offers wry insight into that place on the other side of the globe that at one time we thought would be great to blow up.

**B.Z. NIDITCH**–The artistic director of “The Original Theatre”, with both national and international publishing credits. This is his sixth appearance here and the fifth of his short plays presented in FC.

**WALT PHILLIPS** – Illustrator and poetic typist from various parts unknown over the last year. Finally settled down in American Canyon, California. It is cool to have his drawings back on these pages

**CHARLES PLYMELL** – A prolific writer of epic renown, first appearance in First Class.

**MATHER T. SCHNEIDER** – Second time on these pages, with a piece originally intended to be voiced over the airwaves. Still hangs out in Tucson, Arizona.

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

**CHRIS WATERS** – First time in FC, though poetics have appeared over 120 times in various journals nationally and internationally. Pens thoughts from Saunderstown, Rhode Island.

**TIMOTHY D. WELCH** – First appearance in First Class. Recently finished his B.A. in Music Composition. Resides in Corona Del Mar, California.

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.

#2, Seattle, WA 98122-4196. Submissions: 8772 State Route 80, Fabius, NY 13063. Or, try: [www.geocities.com/paris/leftbank/7419](http://www.geocities.com/paris/leftbank/7419).

**PEOPLE EVERYDAY AND OTHER POEMS** by **Daniel Crocker**: I have yet to read this collection, but if you are familiar with Crocker's work, you know it will be good. There are 92 pages in this one, with a forward by Gerald Locklin. \$12 + \$1 postage to: Green Bean Press, pobox 237, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.

**DOWNWARD GLIDE** by **Errol Miller**: This is poetics. No foolishness, pretension or classless meanderings. Miller is a poet with a talent for putting heavy weight into each word. As Vincent Bator writes of this collection: "A native son of the South, Miller mines the region's indelible history, a milieu of culture, myth and hopeless failings woven into a solid body of poetic epics." Indeed. Ninety pages, professionally presented with full color cover available for \$12 ppd. from: BGB Press, 158 King Street, Northampton, MA 01060.

**THE MOTH EATERS** by **John Bennett**: A collection of John Bennett's longer pieces. A brooding and exciting zone where characters develop and the full tale is told, though always with a bit of mysterious oddity teasing your brain for a time after ingesting. If you have read one of his famous "shards", imagine that as a speedy jolting assault, while in these stories, Bennett has the opportunity to tie you to a chair and spread his tales all over your face. Gorgeous words. Great production. Order yours from: Angelflesh Press, pobox 141123, Grand Rapids, MI 49514.

**ALTERNATIVE MAN** by **Michael Phillips**: High-energy, thoughtful bizzarro. I found it easy to read this collection of short fiction and poetics in one sitting. Imaginary reality and the hard, cold merge in tales dominated by characters whirled in confusion and odd determination. His style is lecture, opinion and story, weaving ideals, sentiment and rage into a cohesive whole. An old-school punk, tempered (slightly) and swollen with skill. This one came out in 1995, runs 65pp, and has an \$8.95 cover price from: Mother Road Publications, pobox 22068, Albuquerque, NM 87154.

**ATOM MIND**: If you are into the 'beat'/booze/sex poetics, perpetrated to the finest degree, and have yet to check out this excellent perfect-bound magazine, send Mother Road (see above) \$6 as soon as possible. You will be treated to over 100 pages of killer writing and gobs of Wayne Hogan images.

**HELL OR CLEVELAND and GODFLESH** by **Eric Evans**: There is solace and anger expressed on the pages of these two chaps. A clever and entertaining writer Evans is occasionally trite, though as minor as the discomfort felt as your tire skips over a small pebble on the highway. Speaking of discomfort, the piece "Godflesh" is as creepily vulgar (real-life-style) and horrific as it gets. The chaps are \$1.75 each, contact his at: 343 Rock Beach Road, Rochester, NY 14617.

**DRIVERS SIDE AIRBAG**: It is nearly impossible to be disappointed in this digest-sized quarterly. It is packed with post-mod pieces of interest to those who appreciate a challenge from the writer, a challenge to think a bit. Thoroughly entertaining and engrossing, with illustrations and comics spicing it up. \$4/issue or \$13/year from: Undulating Bedsheets Productions, pobox 25760, Los Angeles, CA 90025.

**BEAT POET**: Jack Saunders' work in progress. Issue 1 is out, with a string of continuation to follow. This man defines the word *phenom*. Drop him a line: Garage Band Books, Box 1392, Tucker, GA 30085.

**LONG DARK** by **Michael Kriesel**: This is a rolling and roiling poetic narrative, with an especially fine sound as Kriesel has a death-grip on accuracy in communicating colloquial, regional and class-based dialogue. He is able to make the obscene elegant, without sounding a bit over-done or pretentious. Try a copy: H16550 State Hwy 52, Aniwa, WI 54408.

**EVOLUTION**: This is a student publication of Suffolk County Community College in New York. I received an issue and was immediately overwhelmed by the obvious care and effort that went into #55. The outstanding production, which is simple, yet well-planned, including a full-cover cover on linen stock, was nearly equaled by the contents. No submission address, though I recommend this mag for it's sheer beauty.

**RATTLE**: The nice thing about this professionally produced journal is that it looks like a stuffy, crap-hound academia-burdened "review" or "collection" on the outside, yet when I cracked the cover and began to digest the poetic offerings within the pages, I was given a taste of sweet honey from the hive. As bad as this sounds: It is an excellent bundle of words to have in the shitter with you. Clean production and stand-out selections make this one more than worth it: 13440 Ventura Blvd. #200, Sherman Oaks, California 91423.

**TAKING THE FIFTH** by **Albert Huffstickler**: This is a cool collection, a good read, bits and pieces and fragments of Huffstickler's thoughts and poetic meandering, intermingled with illustrations. Short and sweet, though it took me a good half hour to read and absorb. Available from: Press of Circumstance, 312 E. 43rd Street #103, Austin, Texas 78751.

**SNOWBOUND**: The first issue of this mag, which focuses on all things winter-like and snow-enamored (music/countries/sport/experience), drew me in with it's finely-honed and crystal-crisp design and professional execution. I would never usually find myself picking up a mag with a painting of ice hockey players on the cover. Fantastic fotos/collage/short fiction/poetics surround the theme, and it is not the least bit hokey. There is a feature on music from Nordic Europe, and an article by Aubrey Chau on how Hollywood and the NHL view hockey. I wasn't much into the two page spread on Finnish hockey teams, but that was the only low. Snowbound, 3023 N. Clark Street, 708, Chicago, Illinois 60657-5205.

**'TRY THESE' HAS BECOME MY FORUM FOR PROMOTION OF THE WORKS OF WRITERS AND PUBLISHERS WHOM I, FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER, HAPPEN TO APPRECIATE OR ADMIRE. I CANNOT PROMISE THAT EVERY CHAP OR BOOK OR MAGAZINE SENT MY WAY WILL BE MENTIONED HERE, BUT YOU CAN BE DAMN SURE THAT THOSE THAT ARE HAVE PLEASURED MY EYES AND BRAIN. TAKE A SHOT AND SEND YOUR BEST CREATIONS MY WAY.**