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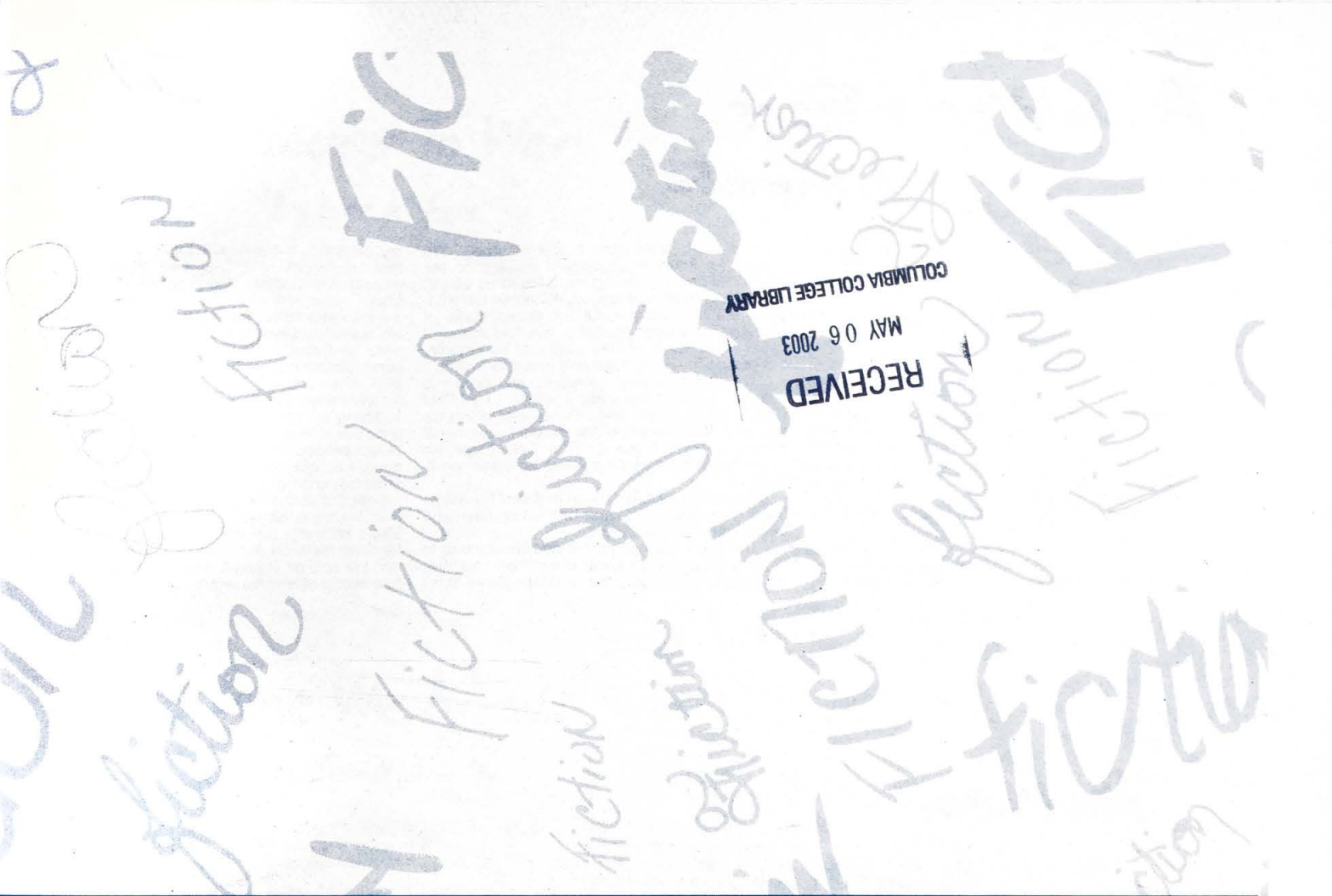


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Fiction Supplement



A Soldier's Tears

By Alverne Ball

The rain fell in puddles, enveloping the soggy grass of the cemetery. The smell of fresh rain was always a joy. His Grandpa had taught him how to smell rain, how to use his nose to detect even the slightest hint of rain, how to sense its coming, but today he just hoped it would fall; fall undetected.

"I can tell now just by smelling the air if its going to rain. Its kind of hard sometimes because I live in the city now and the air there is quite different. It's a little too crowded and filled with a lot of gas fumes and other things that William said would way day destroy what he called the O-Zone layer. I sure do miss William; he's gone to Siberia or something like that. He's suppose to be helping those Rush-ins with their vegetables and stuff, seeing as how their land's are covered with ice and snow.

I remember one time during the big chill when grandpa and I tried to harvest what was left of the corn after the ice storm damn near petrified every

piece of corn stalk from Illinois to Iowa. We worked for hours, the coldness nibbling on our preheated flesh, while the wind licked us across our faces with its rigid tongue. When we were finished we harvested about two-dozen stalks of corn. We ate corn for about a whole month, I never really knew I hated corn until that month, but you on the other hand had grown to love it."

The rain gradually slowed up and began to drizzle. It fell now in tiny splinters upon Paul Risen's Beret. The small drops crept down his shoulder blade and over the Purple Heart medal pinned to his suit jacket. The Gold Eagle pin within his Beret shinned even under these conditions.

He leaned his head down and saw his reflection in his shoes. Flicks of rain fell on them and began to distort the image.

The tears hid behind his eyelids wanting to break through the brick wall the military had built. He kept telling himself that a Green Beret didn't

cry; he killed. It was odd he thought. The military had taught him how to survive off worms and mushrooms, but they hadn't showed him how to cry.

He reached his hand into his side pocket of his jacket and removed a toy soldier holding a rifle. He flipped the toy back and forth within his hand, all the while flipping back tears with every blink of his eyes.

He stared at the toy soldier for a while, then suddenly he gripped it hard within his hand crumpling the soldier, the toy rifle puncturing his palm, blood searing through his fingers. Tears ran down his waxy face, soaking the collars of his shirt, falling down towards the earth.

He fell to his knees. The blood sputtering from his hand, his uniform soaking wet, the Gold Eagle shinning, the Purple Heart reminding, as he flung his arms out cross like, inviting the rain and the cold air in and wrapped them around the headstone of his little brother James.

Anthem

By Angelic Jones

I AM A DIVA!

Don't expect me to bow to your wishes-fuck your ego.

I dominate the world not baby sit the pansies that disguise themselves as society sniveling and crying before me expecting forgiveness for their failures in life from my conversation. Don't base your elation nor depressions on me and my explosive personality. I'm liable to stab you and kick you in

the dirt on a whim.

I cry instead rather than rest my head in a jail cell remembering that the world would rather destroy me than see me revel in the glory of my success, my thoughts, my self-revelations. Stop looking for God in me. I'm not your savior and I won't provide the charity of a little benevolence to make you feel good.

Nor will I live life as a prude or pris, flipping my wrist and crossing my legs daintily.

I am the essence of consumption; I dominate locales, I destroy contenders, I revel in power. I do not fear life nor death. My glory transcends the energy of time.

Big Wheel

By A. B. Drea

I sat out on the porch of our house and smoked a cigarette. Actually, it was my boyfriend's place, but I was there all the time, so I tended to think of it as mine, too. Being on the corner of a dead end street didn't bring much in the way of entertainment, except for Dwight and Dwayne, the next door neighbors' boys. As usual, they were outside causing a ruckus, yelling nonsense, their sort of secret language. Sometimes they occupied themselves by breaking glass or collecting cigarette butts or holding an empty Poland Springs bottle by the neck and hitting things. On this day, they opted for riding their Big Wheel tricycle. Dwayne, the bigger of the two, dominated the vehicle, small legs pedaling furiously up and down the street, going farther and farther into the intersection each time. I wondered if their mother was paying any attention to what they were doing. Had she ever told them to stay away from the main road and to watch out for cars? Was Dwayne being defiant and testing his limits? Or did she simply not care? Brian came outside and stood next to me. Leaning against

the post, he lit a cigarette. Dwight was whining for his turn on the big wheel.

"Aren't they cute?" I said to Brian.

"Those kids are going to be fucked up when they get older," he replied.

I shrugged; he didn't want to have kids. I, on the other hand, loved kids. I could really talk to them, get down on their level, remember what it was like and understand the way they see the world.

Dwight, the younger one, often ran into our yard when he saw us out here. His taut little brown shirtless body jumped around us in nervous excitement, but he wouldn't say anything, just watched us with curiosity.

Brian sat down next to me and we kissed. Just as we pulled our lips apart, Dwight came bounding barefoot across the gravel.

"What were you guys doing?" he asked.

"Don't worry about it," I said. I wasn't about to educate the child on the birds and the bees. Besides, I had a feeling he knew very well what we were doing. Dwayne rode up to make sure he didn't miss anything.

"Hey, Dwayne," I said. "You're getting big. How old are you?"

"Four," he replied, extending four fingers out in front of him. He looked around as if figuring out what to do next but wanted to keep our attention, so he lifted up his Big Wheel awkwardly with both arms, stumbling with this thing the size of himself over his head, and almost crashed it into the side of Brian's roommate's car.

"Wow, you're strong," I said nervously. "You can put it down now."

He threw it to the ground with a look of pride, or perhaps vengeance. I smiled and watched him and his bouncing brother, awaiting their next performance. All of a sudden, Dwight ran back to his yard, and Dwayne, staring at me, declared firmly, "We not gonna come here no more!"

I was shocked. "Why?" I asked.

But Dwayne just grabbed his Big Wheel by the handle and took off on his little legs into the street, dragging the weapon behind him.

24 Hours To War

By Lee Kitzis

The lady at the
café turned around
and asked me
"So when are we
going to war?"

"24 hours"

was all I could
say

A man jerks
off on the train

Another clips his
nails

absentmindedly

while we wait

24 hours

to war

There's a mist outside

Yesterday it was warm

and that was

48 hours

to war

but today

you can't see more
than 40 or 50 feet
in front of you

24 hours

to war
The train
stops at Clark

and Lake

and takes an extra
few seconds

to let the
man in the
wheelchair on

while cranes
carry and construct

in the mist

24 hours

to war

I wait

while cranes carry
and construct in
the mist.

Who Are We Now?

By April Smith

My Black people, My love, My blood
What have we done?
Our past fading in the dark

We have discarded who we are for low
riding pants, the eye blinding jewels
and cars we can't afford

What have we done?
My people, My black people, My love,
My blood
We have disgraced our name and
gave over the reigns
Politics is our enemy and the faceless

man we blame for shame
We are stuck in quick sand and
although we're not struggling for a new
way we are drowning

Drowning because of our own blind-
ness
What have we done?

My people, My Black people, My
blood, My love
The generation gap is widening and
we're all speaking Jibberish
The old folks say the young folks don't
know nothing; and the young folks say

the old folks living in the past.
And then I wonder, why are babies
having babies and boys becoming dad-
dies?

Why are households been torn apart
by the lack of education and the disre-
spect of elders?

What have we done?
And, what will become of our future?

My People, My Beautiful Black People
My Blood, My Love, My Life

The Initial Stages of Flirting

By Kina Muhammad

Experiencing fiery glances, chasing
dark sexy dances of eyes - glistening,
stimulating, watching your body walk by
Exchanges of warm smiles, uncontrol-
lable desires of energy surrounding,
seductive imagery of a nude you
Connecting hot flashes of high temper-
ature passion, imagining tastes of your
plump curvy lips on a body that is built
Feelings of excitement for being the
one invited to make the first move!
What will you do? Play it cool or
become the fool? Not taking a chance

of explicating a possible romance with
a fine mass of squeezable ass? Or not
wanting to feel like a dummy, thinking
the interested one was worth more than
any amount of money
Now let us think this through...someone
is checking you, so should you just play
it smooth & feel what this person is
really trying to tell you?
Noticing several senses of natural
attention from the one across the room
Is it flirting playfully, buoyantly, advanta-
geously or just horny?

Perhaps flirting sincerely, earnestly,
wholeheartedly, maybe making mock-
ery?

Time will only tell if a hopeless love
cast of spells has clouded your judg-
ment or thinking
The cast of spells being the one that
entails the initial stages of flirting

Adore Doubt

By B. Southerland

Rainbows / The shadows of Love / and
always at the end of the rainstorm / the
peace/ The tranquility / And the silence
/ All good qualities / but in your
absence / they are meaningless / But
in tomorrow's eye of truth / There's a
50/50 chance that/ our paths shall
cross again / if they do then hopefully
things lost / shall be / Retrieved / if not
/ then I hope you have a better life

Adore-Unrecognized

These streets / I cry alone /
Completion / is my own / for you / to
view / in cycles of 10 / and circles of 3
/ fall to you / as I would any other /
only for you / to get lost / drown in you
/ like no other has before me / Would
be a fantasy / the confinement of my
conflict / has silenced me / for many a
moment / but only to be near you / in
mind and dream / this could never be /
you're you / I'm me / understandable /
not working out / but you never know
This is self-incrimination/
execution

2

It's a Writer's Thing

By Chris Greiner

One hot afternoon in New Orleans I was sitting on the front porch of my place scratching out my frustrations with my pen. I was dredging for the right words so the woman of my heart would understand; she would have to understand, and then maybe she'd come back. If only I could think of the right thing to say to her she would realize what I had been telling her all along. The words were there, somewhere, they had to be; I'd just have to find the right ones.

And while I was doing this, the neighbors in the green house across the street, they were being very noisy that morning. I thought I'd remembered they were on vacation, but apparently not. Their car was gone though; I hadn't seen that since the day they left for Biloxi. But, they were sure making quite a racket in their backyard.

The words for my letter still weren't coming to me; it would have to be something about trust. I looked up from my pen and saw someone who I'd never seen before at the neighbor's house helping with the moving of some of their things. He was taking them out the door and down the side-alley. The man had a big load; they must be moving a lot of stuff. I needed to concentrate. Yes, I could write to her about trust, the trust we once had in each other, and how it's not dead in me. And then across the street, the same guy came back for another load out the back door; he

seemed to be in a big hurry too. But I needed to ignore this disturbance, and I just went back to my letter.

Well, when the Orleans Parish sheriff was investigating the robbery, they knocked on my door and asked if I had seen or heard anything strange at the neighbors' house while they were on vacation. I was too embarrassed to tell them that I'd watched the whole thing happening from my front porch.

There are countless other examples of how writer's are poor choices as people to watch over your house, or walk you to your car at night. And it is as impossible to apologize for these moments as it is unlikely that anyone other than another artist would understand them.

Artists and Writers are always taking notes about the very life they are forced to live in. And taking notes like this is a gift and a curse. How many artists, who have been caught without a note pad, used a napkin or the back of the phone bill to record a word that just infected them with an image? And how many writers never go anywhere without a pen in their pocket or clipped to their shirt? These aren't decorations, they are first-aid kits. First aid kits for relief from the sudden attack of a good idea. Writers are always on guard.

Writers are always on guard for a new idea, a new image, some twist of words that have never

been seen before. Writers are more on guard for the story than they are for the crack in the sidewalk, even if that crack could swallow a small house pet.

It is often in this reverie, in this respite that stories are made. But it is also here that lives can be lost, marriages ruined, friendships broken. And this dilemma of course, is the Writer's to solve, but it is also the Other's to cope with. And there is no book, nothing written to tell us which is easier.

And so the question comes up, What is to be done with these writers? And what if you are married to one? Protect them, but do not shelter them. Show them anything they want to see, but confess nothing. And if you must bring them to your company picnic, don't harass them with encouragement to *have more fun* when you find them leaning against a tree staring out at god-knows-what. And while at your sister's wedding don't threaten him with the word, *mingle*. Mingle is one of those sharp edged words that never fit easily into a writer's hand. Mingle means smiles and introductions and small talk, none of which a writer has many skills.

Cold Swans

By Mark Caffrey

Thoughts that I'm having
in my head,
in my head.
Warmth, darkness, a breath, but no body
—
no light.
Where from?
Why did you switch it off?
Why did you save me Daddy?
Why do I think I am he?

The eyes.
They were made that way —
but they change.
When the light hits they change.

A creak of the gate to cover up —
but I didn't care.
Why disguise humanity?
It was cold that day.
We knew.

I just wanted to pretend.
To show.

You get so stuck in it.
Don't.
Live.
I was alive.
You saw that.

Generation to Generation

By Neil Ellis Orts

From the darkening room, the boy looked out from the high window. The stone walls were thick and he could barely see past the ledge to the clanging battle silhouetted on the western hills. The battle line did not move, his father's army stood its ground. He heard echoes of the soldiers' rallying cry and he whispered it in reply.

"For the glory." His lips barely moved.

"Son." The boy turned at his father's voice. In the shadows, the man stood, broad shoulders made broader still by the armor. "I'm going to join the battle now."

"We're winning."

"Yes." The father moved to the window slowly, with the steps made formal by military training and royal lineage. At the window, he took in a deep breath. "Smell that?"

The boy followed his father's example and took in the faint scent carried by the cool air. It reminded him of the times the royal family trav-

eled past the place where the peasants slaughtered their livestock.

"Do you smell it?" his father asked again.

"Yes," the boy said. He felt sick and excited at the same time.

"I stood at this same window, about your age, nearly 20 years ago. The scene was the same. It was the last time we fought these people. My own father died out on that battlefield. But we won the battle. This one is as good as won."

The boy had heard the story his whole life, the story of his valiant grandfather, crushing this same nation.

"Are you going to die now?"

"Possibly. They certainly want to see me die."

"Do you have to go? We're winning anyway."

"This is the moment I've lived for, my moment to avenge my father." They stood silent at the window. "Dead or alive, this is my moment of glory."

"I heard that their women and children have

escaped to the northern mountains."

"Yes. That's how it is. That's how we know we've already won."

"I don't understand."

"This final attack is to buy their women time. They go into the mountains for a few years and raise the children of the men dying now."

"Why don't we go into the mountains and be done with these people? Wipe them all out!"

The monarch tenderly put two fingers under his son's chin, raising the small face to meet his eyes. "It is the gift of a warrior to his son. You will need someone to crush someday."

The two turned again to the battlefield. "I must go," the father said. "For the glory."

"For the glory," the son replied and then he was alone, the exhilarating stench animating his imagination.

Tollway 294

By Lee Kitzis

It's when
the rain
clouds look
this ominous
that I
start to
believe in
heaven

A million
angels dying
in Indiana

under sleepy
black and white
Zenith signs
and anti-smoking
billboards

pretty faces
torn by
advertisements

Gary antennas
airplanes death
on the radio
sardine can
trucks and
satellites

mindless
town homes

identical
corporate
buildings

metal fences
as far
as the eye
can see
going 70
down the
expressway

the same
deadpan voice
on the radio
discussing
sexual priests
and bombs in
the Middle
East

Construction
and pickup
trucks w/
toxic drums

smokestacks
ejaculate in
my eye

Degeneration

By Geoff Collins

I awoke one morning to find that the world had ended. Was it really over? Was it just me? Things still went on. Things still go on. On and on and on. Who cares? No one I know. I know no one. Not even myself, I fear.

When I first woke up it wasn't so bad. When I first woke up I wasn't so bad. Now I'm dead, they're dead, you're dead. Then we were alive. Me you them. Them you me. The world around me continues, but I don't. I still saw it all, saw them try to drag me back to them.

Like I said, I awoke one morning to find that the world had ended. Nobody knew it but me. Even now the only people who know it are you, me, and my sister. My mother came into the room that morning to find that I had slept in and deviated from my routine. When she told me to wake up she found I was awake. She told me to, "Get up—go to work. You're late," but the world had ended and she was therefore not there. So how could she have told me that I had to get up? It didn't even make sense because my work had ended with the world. Now I realize that it was only a figment of my imagination.

Later on, when my father returned from his job at the factory to support his drug habit he found me in bed and yelled. He didn't exist so I

just lied there staring at my formerly real walls. He cried, "If you lose your job, how will we get by? Huh? Your precious little sister will have to drop out of that crap college you sent her to and have to get a real job, instead of bummin' off you." That's when he attacked me. I didn't mind the attack so much because it didn't really happen—didn't even feel anything.

My sister learned quickly that something bad had happened, but didn't know what. Every morning before school she brought me breakfast in bed. When she got home she'd get upset, because I didn't eat anything and she cried over it. To make her happy I began to eat. Sometimes, after time had gone by and my job was gone and my father's drug supporting job became a family supporting job, she would come into my view, between me and the amazing fictitious walls, and she'd sit and cry. Sometimes she'd hold my hand. At first it was heartbreaking, but I just reminded myself that she was gone and she knew it and wasn't really sad. That's when I stopped eating again. After a bit of not eating, my sister brought in doctors. By now, my sister had dropped out of school to get a job to support the doctors. The doctors looked at me and gave me tubes to let me live. They never stayed long because there was-

n't enough money to make them stay. My sister took care of me when she wasn't at work. My father hated her because she supported me and the doctors and not herself. He supported her but not his drugs. Eventually my mother got a job to support his drugs. His drugs took his job and he had to get a new one. Now he couldn't fully support my sister and he wouldn't let my mother cut off his drugs that took his old job. Now my sister had to stop supporting the doctors so that she could support me. At first I felt bad, but reminded myself that nothing was happening.

Eventually my father's drugs started to take the money that was supporting the family. Eventually he could no longer support my sister. So my sister had to work more to support the whole family. Now I was alone. She had no time for me except to give and take things that supported my tubes of life.

That's when my sister began to resent me. My tubes were hard to support. When she'd come in to replenish them, she'd look at me in anger. One day she snapped. She, too, attacked me. Told me to, "Snap out of it, you brain dead asshole!" that's when she realized that the world had ended, and left. Not only the room, but the house. For good. Soon time, too, ended.

Dear Lady

By April Smith

I didn't know you very well, but I've heard a lot about you.
I've been told that you're kind and very gracious in mind.
Your voice was as sweet as a bird and as soft as a feather.

You died when he was very young and when I wasn't planned to be born.
I've seen your pictures and memorized your face.
I idolized your spirituality and have your grace.

I visit you in that big place where many souls have found their place.
And when I'm there I feel your presence, which is like a heavenly message.

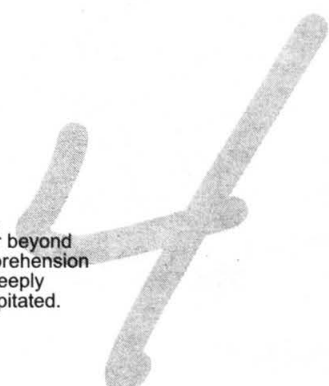
Eclipse

By R.C. Paraskiv

hold
in captivity
darkness
feared
in between

life and death
dark and light.
a scream in the
distance
of the unborn

child,
terror beyond
comprehension
felt deeply
decapitated.



A Folk Tale

By Susan Babyk

Once upon a heck of a time, in a land called Faraway, lived a little girl who had problems communicating. Oh, she could talk, and answer yes or no when spoken to, and could ask with one word, why; but as soon as she tried to put two words together, things just didn't work. "Over and under" came out "hire the dander"; "it's a beautiful day" was "did a butterfly die"; and "please pass the peas" would sound like "peace plastic plum."

Now, her mother didn't worry too much about it. She thought the problem was just shyness, a phase she would soon outgrow. And her father, who wasn't around a lot, tended to agree. Why spoil a child so young? Treat her like everyone else. As long as she can say please and thanks, she'll get by.

She had plenty of playmates that treated her well, and they played together from dawn to dusk, hiding and seeking and roller skating. They even made up her very own word to call everyone home from their hiding place. Instead of "Ollie, ollie, in free," she only needed to call "Leo, Leo," and that worked just fine, because she had no

trouble saying two words in a row, as long as they were the same.

Now one sunny day in Faraway all of the kids were playing volleyball in a big green field. When the ball went out of bounds the little girl ran to fetch it. The grass was pretty tall, and she tripped and fell into a little hole, where she found a heavy treasure chest, buried half-way and spilling over with gold. She tugged and pulled, but the chest wouldn't budge, and the gold was too heavy to carry away. She climbed out of the hole and ran as fast as she could back to the game. She yanked on her best friend's sleeve, and jabbered excitedly. "I found the treasure. I found the gold," she tried to explain, but all she could utter was "Ivan the Feather," and "Ivan the Bold." Her best friend shrugged and went back to the game.

But she was too excited, so she quickly ran home. "Mother, mother, I found a treasure," and she took her mother's hand. "Madder, madder, I made a ladder," was all her mother heard. So Little Misunderstood went skulking off alone, without saying more. She headed for her favorite

place, a playground by the waterfall. She sat down in her favorite spot, a seesaw near a swing. She talked away to herself, for she had no trouble understanding her own conversation, and she always had plenty to say. "I'm rich, I'm rich, a pirate's treasure," she sadly sang, trying to come up with some kind of plan.

"What's this about a pirate's treasure?" said someone standing behind her, and she turned to find the tallest kid she'd ever seen, looking down at her, waiting for an answer.

"Excuse me? Did you hear what I said? Can you understand me?" she asked him.

"What's to understand? If you're rich and you've got a pirate's treasure, I sure would like to see it." Stringbean waited patiently.

She led him to the field, and together they searched for the treasure trove, but the hole was nowhere to be found. Still, for the first time in her life the little girl had someone to talk to, so she decided this was better than any old pirate's gold, and chattered away happily every after with her new-found friend.

Hot, Candy-Coated Kisses

By Kina Muhammad

Love, like a candy coated drop of sweet sentimental plops of warm juicy kisses
Showers of rainy love with a hint of cinnamon plums heating in rocketing dimensions
Awaking to whispers of sugary submissions of tender, passionate kisses
Moments of feeling high on an emotional overdrive to conquer the one who wants to ride
Kiss, kiss to the Miss whose obsessiveness is tempted by more and more of his blissful kisses

Any man that can cause a trance to the one that he wants to romance and then quickly but sensuously implement his master plan is definitely THE MAN!
You said nothin' but a word - that can only be heard by the ears of yearning Mistresses and Mrs.'s and of course, additional hot candy coated kisses
I am really impressed how quickly we undress to unite our bodies into one heap of syrupy milk and honey
And don't you dare make a unnecessary

glare at no one but your loved one who can nevaah, evah be compared
So, just how hot are my candy coated kisses? Hot enough to stop the clock of time and spend less than a dime to cool off this hot candy coated kiss of mine!

Bad Ending

By Geoff Collins

You're at a party with one of your friends. On the way there you already knew that you'd hate everybody there and your friend would talk to everyone except you. But you go anyway for free booze and because it's way up in this big ass tall building 'n you got a bunch of coins that you're gonna throw out the window to see if it's true that you can hurt people by doing that.

So now you're at the party, standing alone on the balcony. Quickly you learned that the coin thing wouldn't work, so you dropped 'em all in one big handful. They rain down and come crashing onto a parked car leaving dings 'n scratches all over it. But from where you are all you see is them falling into nothing, and never realize that you just fed up some guy's car.

As the party goes on you remain out on the balcony, occasionally joined by someone who has 't vomit off the side of the balcony and sometimes someone'll pass out on the ground. All you do is watch the puke smash into the ground and the now completely fucked parked car that you hit

with the coins. A voice asks, "What's your name?" Whirling around the lingering buzz from earlier drinks can be felt. Standing there is the sexiest thing on two legs. The eyes...the hair...the body. All of it breath taking. "My name is Pat. What's yours?"

"Chris." Chris joins you at the edge of the balcony, looking down at the street. Chris asks, "What brings you here?"

"My friend brought me. I don't like parties; I just wanted to throw things."

"Yeah, I'm not too fond of the whole party thing either. Why do these people need an excuse to get fucked up? Can't they do it on their own?"

"Yeah, I know. At least it's free, right?"

"I know I've already put a few bottles of liquor in my car."

"You drunk yet?"

"No, I'm a little buzzed, though."

"You wanna use this crappy party as an excuse to get fucked up at that park down the street?"

Chris smiles, "Sure."

Before I know it, you're sitting in the park with a bottle-a vodka with Chris. As you guys lie down in the grass takin' turns takin' swigs Chris says, "You know it's illegal to be in the park right now."

"Actually I don't."

"Now you do."

"No I don't," laughing.

"You know it's also illegal to have sex in public."

"No it's not." You kiss. Kiss for a while without any inhibitions about it, 'n grope 'n all that other fun stuff. Cars go by, but who cares? Not you. Not Chris. Cars are just lights shining by. You got your eyes closed, so light doesn't matter too much either. Everything in the world is suddenly meaningless. The party, the coins, the trashed car—meaningless. You 'n Chris. Chris 'n you.

Clothes start getting discarded as the bottle comes back into the situation. But it all comes to an abrupt and awkward halt because of whiskey dick.

Falling Rain

By C.P. Chang

Falling rain is a holy thing.
It is difficult to bear without a pure soul,
and we all cover ourselves
with clothing, with raincoat, with umbrella,
lest we are bared before a light too strong to stand.
Far from washing away our sins, it floods the deepest wells of our spirits, and from them arise those passions and memories which pain and yet delight us.

For some it is the memory of childhood.
It is a time before
we learned that Cleanliness was next

to Holiness.
Young men and women remember a time before
designer jeans, hundred-dollar haircuts, and Ray-Ban sunglasses. The Employed remember a time before the Clock,
the Responsible remember a time when Action had no Re-Action.

For others it is the re-awakening of the senses.
The caress of water,
and the blowing of wind upon skin,
the elation of lightning,
and the luscious boom of thunder which follows –
they all awaken that sensuality which

we know has no place in the here and now. Better saved for later, we tell ourselves, but
we know that the Moment is Now.

How do I say that falling rain is a holy thing?
It is commanding without being demanding.
In the rain, we cannot help but be one with Nature. The earth and sky in their majesty, they consume us and yet leave us more purely ourselves than before.

Stand in the rain, and revel in the Spirit that moves you.

Leaving Again

By C.P. Chang

My son Steven first left home when he ran away at the age of 17. Before then, while his mother was in and out of drug rehab, Steven and I struggled together to keep her clean. We argued sometimes, but only in whispers and when worry had not exhausted us. But after his mother died, Steven and I fought too often, for too long, and with only the bitterest of truth. It was all too formulaic, and yet in the midst of it, neither of us could stop our decline. I said I wanted only the best for him – and I did believe that – but we were both strong-headed, and in the heat of argument, we each said things that we shouldn't have. And then one night, drunk (though he denied it later), he wrecked my Toyota pickup. I was furious beyond sensibility. He had too much of his mother in him, and I couldn't stand it. I tore apart his bedroom, destroying lamps and glass, and bleeding from my hands, I threw him bodily out of the house, throwing his clothes, his CDs, his paperback books, and his framed pictures after him.

It was the weekend before I calmed down, and by then he had already visited his mother's parents in Indiana, borrowed bus fare, and left. I began to receive calls from relatives and Steven's scattered friends from summer camps. Always his

method was the same: an honest and straightforward request not to be handed over, borrowing bus fare with a promise of payment, and then after a day or two, disappearance without warning. None of his temporary hosts handed him over to me, and I couldn't blame them. At the start, I left a greeting on the answering machine in case Steven called. It demanded in no uncertain words that he return home immediately. More than once the machine recorded a call of nothing more than the receiver being slammed down.

But as the days grew to weeks, the messages changed from Come Home to Take Care. I called every distant friend and relative Steven had ever heard of, leaving messages for him everywhere: Boston, Baltimore, Kalamazoo, Kansas City, Sioux Falls, San Jose. I just wanted to know that he was safe. Four months and twelve days after he ran away, he left the short message, "Dad... I'm okay. Just wanted to say that." He paused and left lonely silence on the answering machine. "Take care. Happy birthday."

When he finally returned home, I welcomed him with open arms, and though we both refused to shed any tears, I held him close to me like he was my last breath. I was glad to have him for the

short time I did. He was gone again a year later, this time to college. But this was easier. We spent holidays and summers together, and when he was away at school, he called and wrote often. I flew up for spring break and met his friends on the ski slopes; he surprised me by accepting me so quickly. He came down one weekend for my company picnic; he surprised me again by coming simply because I asked him. He grew stronger and wiser than I had ever been, learning from the mistakes than his mother and I had made, and refusing to repeat those errors.

Now he's leaving again. Finished with school, and moving to start his new job and to marry the woman he loves. To start a new life. To start a new family. He's grown now, and he doesn't need me. I want him to leave his past behind, I truly do. He deserves a new beginning, without the baggage of his mother's memory and myself. He'll have holidays and vacations in storybook fashion, and if it is in fact a white picket fence that circles his yard, I'm sure he'll laugh and be quite content with it. I'm proud of him, so proud of him, but I know I'll miss him more dearly than ever. It's not so much that he's leaving again. It's not that at all. It's that he's really leaving for the first time.

Loving A Beautiful Man

By Kina Muhammad

A strong body of silky flesh that any real woman would love to caress
His shade of color or size matter less -
Only if this man knows how to use his tools to maximize the ultimate pleasure
Climbing to the top of this silky man's crop to unleash his clever mental golden treasures
Praying for guidance for he is the finest of all that I would need to be - me!
Discovering he is definitely the man for me!
Embracing all that he has to offer to me, a lifetime of serenity
Talks of loving thee, sharing tranquility, standing by his side until the end of time
Making hot steamy love from his mind all the way down to the grind
Sweeping him off his feet into a soft landing of romantic hot heat courted but my

angelic whispers of how I will master thee
Not a brief moment goes by that we don't touch when saying good-bye for the morning has too quickly arise
For this man is there always to love and to care but no way will we ever decide to share our love - equals devotion
Times do get rough but hopefully not too tough for us to ever, ever part our ways
Giving him space so that he can pace himself to reassemble his thoughts
But don't fooled by how much space I approve because we need each other like we need air and water
He is adorable, loveable, enjoyable, delectable, pleasurable and Oh Yes... palatable & edible for those sweet tooth moments of collectable nibbles on his tender firm nipples

Let us take a little rest for we are too stressed to handle the passion of this love OK! That's enough! Let's get back to the rough and buff of misty sweat & talks of beautiful stuff that will happen on the next loving making round
How can women do without the man I just drew for you just witnessed the love that is destined
Hard it may be to not have a man like thee but pray and ask
For God's hand is always in command and He will grant you your every wish
Now back to the man that is at hand, to understand, that once we get this man, to keep him joyful, cheerful, and humble for his woman will be at his every demand

6

Comparing Hearts

By Jane Cox

It was when they were on Juliette's leopard print coated bed. Juliette's entire room was filled with splashes of leopard print, her bed, a throw-rug, a lamp-shade, the curtains, even a picture frame that contained the image of Juliette and Serena was leopard print. Sometime during Juliette's junior year in high school, she became known as the girl who always wore leopard print and over the past two years her fascination with leopard-print had festered into an obsession.

"Come here," Keegan said.

"I'm right here," Juliette had said. Well, she was. He was lying on her bed, and she was sitting on it, right next to him.

"Lie with me," Juliette stifled laughter. To her it sounded like something a stable boy from Shakespeare's time would say to a stable girl! Of course, "lie with me" would mean, have sex with me, and Juliette knew that's not what Keegan meant. But it seemed so corny. Had Calvin said it, she would not have had to stifle her giggles. She would giggle, he'd ask why. No, he wouldn't have to ask why, he'd understand, and if for some reason he didn't understand on his own, once she explained it, he'd laugh and add some clever observation.

"Why?" Juliette had asked Keegan.

"I want you to try out the upper left section of my chest, remember? I told you it was really nice and comfy?"

He sure had. Of course the only reason that had ever come up in conversation was because

Keegan had been talking about how much weight he'd lost, as usual. And Juliette was talking about Calvin, as usual. Juliette had been saying that she liked men who had some meat on their bones, like Calvin and Tony; they were more comfortable to sleep on. Of course, Keegan then proceeded to make fun of Calvin for having a potbelly. Juliette defended Calvin's belly vehemently.

"He may be a stomach cruncher drop-out," Juliette said, "But he doesn't have a pot belly."

Juliette had to admit that Keegan's upper left chest area was pretty comfortable. She could hear his heart beating, it was so steady and calm. She thought about how often she had been in this position with Calvin, how every time she heard his heart beat, and how it made her feel. When she heard Calvin's heart, it excited her. It set off something in her. It told her that he was alive and that she was alive, and it made it all real. And Calvin's heartbeat was nothing like Keegan's. Calvin's heartbeat was much faster, erratic; it would speed up, depending on what they were talking about or what Juliette did with her body, how she adjusted her head or her arm. That was exciting, to know that she was responsible for physical changes in Calvin, that she could make his heart rate increase. Keegan's heartbeat remained exactly the same. Of course they weren't saying anything and she wasn't fidgeting much. So she tried fidgeting slightly, to see if there would be a change, but nothing. It made Juliette think that Calvin cared more for her than

Keegan did. A preposterous idea, of course, Calvin wasn't in love with her, he had told her so often enough.

Keegan was the one who was in love with her; he had told her, well, not in so many words. He had figured a way of telling her so that he gave himself a way out in case she responded negatively.

"So, I had a dream about you," Keegan had said.

"Oh yeah?" Juliette wasn't too interested; Keegan had had a lot of those recently, or so he claimed, but he would never go into detail about the dreams.

"Yeah. So, I really hope this doesn't creep you out. I really hope you don't think I'm a creep for saying this, but in the dream I told you that I loved you."

"Oh," Juliette said, "And that was it?"

"Well, in the dream, you were really skeptical, like you kept saying that I didn't know you well enough to say that."

"Ah."

"I guess that was about it. You're really creeped out, aren't you?"

"Not at all." I'm not Calvin, she wanted to say, I don't think it's creepy when people love me, I can accept love. If you love me, Keegan, I won't push you away. But she didn't say that. Instead, she had just said, "Not at all." And that was that.

Martyr

By R.C. Paraskiv

overwhelmed
by unbearable
sufferings of
the people left
behind with empty
souls inside

the apocalyptic
existence.

last unspoken
words drip
heavily

from the top of
the mountains
in the solitude
of the immortal
abyss.

Even The Side Streets Get The Blues

By Lee Kitzis

I looked out
the window
and saw a
ball of busted
up cars shattered
glass and metal
ground together
by the weight of
cruel machinery

I saw a garbage
can fire too

but no one
was around

The Lockwood
and Lake signs
have been hanging
bent for as long
as I can remember

collecting the dust
of angry music

in the winter

when the music
becomes too much

and even the
side streets get
the blues

Sleep Over

By Geoff Collins

We were having a sleepover at Mary's house, 'n, like, everyone was there. 'N we were, like, calling boys that we like. 'N then Jenny picks up the phone, 'n she's like, "I'm going to call Timmy 'n tell him Kristen likes him!" 'n I, like, so don't like him. So I was, like, totally freaking out, 'n I started chasing her around the living room, while she was dialing his number, 'n everyone was like in there screaming, 'n stuff. 'N then, everyone got, like, quiet, because she was on the phone with him, 'n then, like, she was about to tell him that I like him,

'n I was like, so freakin' out—I thought I would die. 'n then this, like, Ford Bronco, like, bursts through the wall, 'n ran her over, 'n sent, like, all this glass 'n wood all over the place. 'N I like totally got glass in my hair, 'n like everyone jus' sorta gasped 'n like stood there. 'N then Michael Jackson 'n McCauley Caulkin got outa the car—honest to god.

'N Michael was like, "I told you that wasn't the road. Let's haul ass to Never Land and have a sleep over." 'N then they both ran off.

'N then Mary's dad came down 'n like started to swear 'n cry 'n then he spent half an hour trying to talk to Jenny, but she was dead—duh. Finally he calls 911, 'n the police 'n ambulance come 'n all that. But the police said, "Why would Michael Jackson and McCauley Caulkin pull a hit and run in a Ford Bronco? It just doesn't make sense." So they didn't believe us, 'n the car had been stolen, so they jus' let 'em go. True story.

How May I Love Thee Less?

By C.P. Chang

(With apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

How may I love thee less? Let me count the ways.
I could love thee for only the height and length and waist
My arms can hold, when in need of the taste
Of thine Beauty and the warmth of the

Touch.
I could love thee for only dinner and tea,
The evening kisses, soft talk, and savory wine.
I could love thee selfishly, for you to be mine.
I could love thee for frivolity and fun,
The sake of roles played and the safety of dates filled.

All these ways I could love thee less and let passion cool
If only to grant thee air to breathe and space to run.
Because a love that binds one into two cannot be True.
More precious than love is the right for thee to be One.

Late

By Helen Failing

You grabbed me by the hand and said we needed to speak
of what had happened the night before when we made love
on the couch. I'd never done that before, was I dreaming?
I said what did it matter? So we took a chance
that your parents might come home sometimes that night,
but I didn't really think they would once it started to snow.

I turned my head to look out the window at the snow
that sparkled against the moon. I was just about to speak
when you said to hush 'cause you heard a bump in the night.
You shook your head and called me crazy in love
with danger. You caressed my cheek, then chanced
a look in my eyes. Then I fell deep asleep

and tried so hard to run from the nightmares

where I was naked and you were lost in the blizzard.
I fell into a hole, like Alice, taking a risk
that I wouldn't be late if the white rabbit wanted to chat
about how late he was. I asked if he'd seen you, my love,
and he said you wandered off into the cloudless night.

He left me there, cold and naked under the night sky
and I guess I fell asleep, but I was already dreaming,
so where would I end up? I found you with my faith
still intact, though frozen by the falling icy crystals
that gave off whispers that turned to shouts when they spoke
of what kind of stunt I had pulled and man was I lucky.

I was so lucky to have gotten another shot
at seducing you; this time in the simulated night

of your bedroom with the stars painted that spoke
of past missions to the moon that filled your dreams
when you were younger. Shooting stars move like snowflakes
that are too heavy to float any longer. They miss the love

they felt from their mother moon who still loved
them when they were gone. They, like me, took the chance
to fall in love and spin in the cascading snow
and wind that tumbled in the dreary January nights.
Then you held me close and said to sleep with no dreams
because otherwise you'd have to comfort me by speaking

of how I loved making love in the snow last night, past midnight
when you said you loved me and chanced sex on the sofa
while I dreamed of a white rabbit who spoke of the lateness of the hour.

The Professor and Elizabeth

By Chris Greiner

It was getting late at The Steel Bridge Café, and when the members of the Thursday Writer's Club finished reading from their novels-in-progress, everyone headed for the cash bar. Elizabeth knew she would have time for a couple of cigarettes and maybe one drink. One of the readers was a professor of hers and had promised to walk her to her car when he got done signing copies of his book. Its not that she was afraid of being alone, it was just that this was an unfamiliar and uncomfortable part of town for her to be in after dark.

After the professor signed the last book, he and Elizabeth grabbed their coats and headed out into the boulevard talking about the microphones and the spotlights. Outside in the cold air, street lights and shop windows shown brightly as the two of them weaved in and out of the sidewalk traffic of city people doing the things city people do just after midnight.

At the red light on the corner, the professor, while explaining to his favorite student his alternate choice for the evening's reading, noticed two lovers quarreling on the steps of a closed dress shop. It must have been quite a quarrel; sad and deep, and way beyond the early stages of screaming at someone's unfairness and someone else's lies. The professor saw that it was the woman who was crying, while the young man was

trying his best to look remorseful without appearing guilty. When the light turned green, Libby was explaining why her paper was late, and that she promised it would be in his office before the weekend, yes, it would definitely be in his office before the weekend, that was for sure.

At the next corner, the teacher and the student turned right down a small street, and continued discussing page-count and the value of revising and re-writing even her best fiction. The foot traffic on this side street thinned out immediately, as did the street lights and shops windows. The professor and the student were nearly the only people going away from the activity on the boulevard. There was a couple across the street walking hand-in-hand and wearing matching jackets. The professor guessed they were newlyweds and made a mental note to add "matching jackets" to the new couple in his novel.

Just ten yards or so down the block the professor noticed a tall man step quickly out from in between two bushes on to the sidewalk. The man was heading toward them with his hands in his pockets, wearing a baseball cap and large dark sunglasses. Sunglasses at midnight drew the professor's vague curiosity; a character habit, he thought.

Elizabeth was saying something about her

book report that was past due when the man in the sunglasses approached the two of them and pulled something thin and shiny out of his jacket. It was an old kitchen knife, and the first thing that occurred to the professor was how out of place a utensil from someone's private kitchen looked, outside and away from its cutting board and other knives.

But the man in the sunglasses seemed very mad at them and wanted whatever Libby was carrying in her bookbag. He gestured for it with the end of his knife, and the professor heard Libby say, "No!" For a second, all three of them froze; the man with the knife and the student looked at the professor. The professor had never seen a mugging before, and this was definitely a mugging, he was going to remember this for a long time. Then the man with sunglasses reached out and pulled the student's bookbag out of her hands, knocking her into her friend for good measure before running toward the boulevard. The professor fell into the dirt and watched the man tuck his weapon back into his coat and disappear into the lights at the street corner.

After this experience Elizabeth and the Professor rarely spoke to each other. The professor published a story about the incident in the Georgia Review, and the student dropped his Fiction Seminar.

No More Goldie Poem #2

By Chandra Brown

TODAY IS THE DAY THAT WE COME
TO MOURN
THE LIFE OF GOLDIE
SHE LIVED A LONG AND INTEREST-
ING LIFE
SOME MY MISS HER
SOME LOVED HER
BUT NOW SHE IS GONE
SHE HAD NO LAST WORDS OR
WISHES
SHE LEFT WITH NO FAN FAIR

AND SOME PEOPLE
WON'T EVEN KNOW THAT SHE IS
GONE
SHE WAS A VERY BEAUTIFUL PER-
SON
WITH NO HEART AT ALL
HER HEART HAD BEEN TAKEN
AWAY
A LONG TIME AGO
GOLDIE LIVED FOR EACH DAY
WITHOUT THOUGHTS OF TOMOR-

ROW
NOW SHE'S GONE
GOLDIE ANSWERED TO NO ONE
BUT QUESTIONED ALL
TODAY IS THE DAY THAT
I SAY GOOD-BYE
THAT I LIVE FOR ME
TODAY IS THE DAY
THAT I AM WHOLE AGAIN

Rock Star Interview #1

By Tim Lotesto

We've been in the limo for three hours now, trying to coax the rock star to wake up already. His manager, who's been sitting next to the rock star the entire time, won't let us touch him or speak loudly. So we (the photographer and I) have been trying to wake him using only the power of positive thinking. We've been sending wake up vibes across the car, from our minds to his dreaming one.

The power of positive thinking is shit. Vibes are shit. The rock star has begun to snore. "You know," the manager chuckles through his sweat, "the road can be exhausting. Especially when you're playing to packed houses every night." What he's really thinking is 'don't let them write about drugs don't let them write about drugs please don't let them write about drugs.' These are the vibes that he's

sending. The photographer is a woman who I tried to kiss at last night's show. I didn't know that she was the photographer then, just that her shirt was tight and that the complimentary gin and tonics were bubbling inside me. Today, things are tense. There are so many vibes in the back of this limo that they fog up the tinted windows. Rock star please wake up.

An Open Letter To Diary Readers

By Julianne Stinoff-Lai

Dedicated to those who were disappointed in Kurt Cobain after reading his diary

I have a problem with you. Yes, you, reading this page right now. I want you to read, I designed this space just for you. I desire you in the way a virgin desires her first lover, a very fitting metaphor, because I have imagined this many times, our meeting in print, and fantasized many possibilities. But in the same way that you don't know me, I don't know you. We don't know what we're getting into do we? Maybe we shouldn't have this little fling; we could catch a social disease.

You should know there have been others before you. That's why I have problems, issues you might say. I wasn't ready to be read, to be taken. My mother was the first. (Freud would have a field day with that statement.) She found the diary I kept as a kid, which, incidentally, I can't believe she bothered to wade through. It was full of banal descriptions of my days, "wake up, watch cartoons, have some Coco Puffs, go to school, come home, watch cartoons, go to bed," and rants about my lack of control over my own life. I cited my mother as the cause of all my childish trouble, of course. How clichéd, I know, but I wasn't ready for an editor just yet. Not ready to tap into the vast twelve-year-old market, to be the first pre-teen with a best seller. I fantasized about publication as all writers do, I sometimes even imagined an appreciating audience reading my journal, but it remains a fact, I wasn't ready to be read. Not by my mother at least.

The fight began as all fights begin, with something stupid. I probably didn't make my bed and it turned into a fight about my issues with authority, the fact that I don't respect the same values as my mother, that her work to keep the house clean etc. meant nothing to me. In short, I didn't appreciate her. I argued, in return, that she was trying to control every aspect of my life, that she didn't

trust me to take care of things myself, that she was overbearing and suffocating. However, translated into my twelve-year-old vocabulary this eloquent speech went something like, "Leave me alone! I hate you!"

I rediscovered that journal from my early teen years not too long ago. My mother actually gave it to me when she found it in a box of other old junk she wanted to be rid of. It is of the puffy fabric-covered variety; the pattern on the fabric is designed to look like paint slashes of pastel pinks, greens, blues, and peaches. I loved it. I wrote as much on the first page, "I love this journal. It's so pretty." And I lamented that I had nothing worthwhile to write in it. Already I had begun down the road of insecurity that would lead me to today, and you, fair reader, who I love and hate.

So, I had just told my only mother that I hated her and she shot back, "I know! I know what you write about me in your journal!" Shit. I didn't have the confidence or presence of mind to be pissed off. All I could feel was guilty. Busted. I had committed a mortal sin in conveying my mother to paper the way that I did. We had the rather typical family policy of silence about painful issues. We were not supposed to blab our problems to strangers. We were supposed to protect the family image, whatever that was. By writing down my complaints, I had made them public, or possibly public. They could be read by anyone who found my journal. This was a problem for both of us.

I have re-read the entry that my mother was probably so angry about. It was a rant inspired by the lecture my mother gave me on my C grade in pre-algebra, a class I struggled mightily in and hated even more mightily. I complained that my parents expected too much from me, wanted me to be perfect. About halfway through the entry, my mother is no longer named, but becomes "She," sometimes underlined or capitalized for emphasis. "She" became a malevolent goddess, the cause of all my misery, a sort of Uber-bitch, a

Kipling-esque "She who must be obeyed." It must have been painful to read that caricature of herself. "Ah, how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!" But I never intended for her to read it! Or did I? I think there was a line in there, "SHE's probably reading this right now. SHE's rude enough to do that." I must have known something. I was always writing to be read, always imagining an audience. My early diaries were in the form of letters to an imaginary person, Anne Frank-style. Subliminally, I always wanted to be read I just imagined my reader as someone who adored me and thought my every word was pure genius.

There's something about committing words to paper that is just that, "committing," in all the many senses of the word. It is making a commitment to a certain belief, a certain image of a person or event and then making that image permanent on a page. It also feels to me like committing a crime or a sin. There is a guilty pleasure in re-creating reality the way I want it to look. I never really got my say in the arguments with my mother. She always ended up being right, "because I'm the Mommy, that's why." So I made a world on paper where I was right, where the argument could end the way I wanted it to end. It seemed harmless, a small lie, a small sin.

The look on my mother's face that day was pure rage and hurt, though. It was not a small sin to her. It turned out to not be a small sin for me, either. I am still paying penance today. I hide my journals. If I write on the train or in a café, I keep the page half-covered with my arm, protecting myself. But I am also protecting you, reader. There might be something in here you don't want to see, that would bring your rage down on me like raining metal hammers. Something that might hurt you. In fact, stop reading right now it's for your own good.

Mama's Blues

By Chandra Brown

Mama always loved hard
And loved hard men
She would give her all to him
And he would give his all back
In the form of a fist to the face
The harder he hit her
The harder she loved him
At times her face was more
Blue than black
But he would just kiss her
On the place the hurt the less
And she would try to
Smile back
Mama, leave him
You don't have to take this
Baby
When you become a woman
You will understand
The
Woes of loving
A black man

Mama would work hard all day
To come home
To work again
She would come home
To her non working man
Did you try to look
For a job today
Woman shut up
You don't understand
The white man is making
It hard for your black man
The minute I walk through
The door
They ask me who I'm looking for
Oh that job has been filled
Now see you then just pissed me off
Coming in here
Thinking you the boss

Now take you ass back downstairs
And bring me my meal
My day was hard too
And I anit gone let you come down on
me
If I have to tell you again
To fix me something to eat
Mama you don't have to stay
Please let's leave today
Baby
When you became a woman
You
Will understand
The ways of
A black man

Mama would lay in bed some nights
alone
Waiting for her man to come home
When he finally came in she didn't
Complain
She just ask him if he needed any-
thing
She knew he was out with some stank
ho
She smelled the other woman's pussy
On him as he hit the door
I would plead with her
Mama you still can
Go
So you can find a man
That will love you more
Baby
When you become a woman
You will understand
The ups and downs
Of loving
A black man

Mama would fix a drink
And set in front of her radio
Playing 8 tracks and 45s
And listen to songs
That made her feel alive
Mama would sit there sometimes
All day
Dreaming of life another way
She would sit and sing
And sing and sit
Mama why do you listen to
This music
You look so sad
Baby
When you become a woman
You will understand
That all you have is a black man

One day he hit mama
And she hit the floor
While she was down there
She knew she wouldn't
Take it anymore
Mama got up and told
Her man he had to go
He told her he will never leave
Don't you know that you need me
Mama went to the kitchen
And grabbed a knife
And in one split second
She took her black man's life
Mama why didn't you
Just leave along time ago
Mama said baby
When you become a woman
You will understand
That you will
One day get tired of
Taking the shit
From your black man

Maya's Dream

By Anonymous

Maya went downstairs and threw herself on the couch in the basement. She was trying to remember why she left Cuba. She could see the house in Verdado, where she lived as a child. She could smell the burning sugar cane it was like licorice candy in the air. The house was not crumbling and the yard not overgrown like when she had last seen it. The stairs were repaired and it was painted a pale yellow. There were curtains in the windows and flowers in the yard. The door stood open and she walked in. There was a large gilded mirror in the hall and a long, polished, mahogany table set with matching plates in the dinning room. She walked through the house to the back. Her grandmother, Lala, was in the yard standing on a kitchen chair using both hands to stir a huge pot with a wooden broom handle. Lala had built a big fire on the patio. The smoke from the burning wood had sent the mosquitoes back into the thick jungle foliage at the back of the yard. Her grandmother was singing *Dos Gardenias Para Ti*, the sweetest, saddest song about *enamorado* forever.

"Abuelita, what are you doing up on that chair?"

"Making the soup. Maya, *mi nieta*, I knew you

would come if I made the soup. Everyone is coming for the soup tonight, she called from the chair, patience is its own reward, things will come to those who wait"

The special soup Lala was making was the one she had always talked about when Maya was a child. It was from a recipe that *her* grandmother had brought from Spain. Maya never remembered her actually making it, but she did remember her saying it was the most delicious soup anyone had ever tasted. It had seventeen ingredients. She was always trying to gather them up but it never happened, by the time she got the carrots and onions, the saffron and the bay leaves, the rice or the beans would be gone. Maya's mother always said that it was stupid to have a recipe that needed seventeen ingredients in Cuba. Besides it sounded hot and spicy and the last thing Cubans need to eat is something hot and spicy. Why would you want to heat up the house all day cooking a pot of soup?

But this day Lala had all seventeen ingredients and she was making the soup. She stirred the pot for hours to keep it from burning on the bottom. After a while Maya offered to take a turn while her *abuelita* went into the house to rest.

When the fire started to die out Maya went in to get a ladle and a pitcher to bring the soup to the table. The table was set with plates of crusty bread and dishes of butter. There were glasses of wine at each place and the candles were burning. On the dining room wall was a painting of a girl standing up in a boat laden with flowers with feathers in her hair floating down a river. Maya looked at the painting for a long time then called to her grandmother but she didn't answer. Maya went upstairs to the bedrooms. Everything was in place. There were beautiful hand-crocheted covers on the beds and rugs on the floors. Little vases of flowers were set out on each night table. On the walls were the wedding pictures of all her grandparents and her parents, there were baby pictures of all her cousins but no pictures of her. She couldn't find her *abuela*. She called out to her and went back down to the parlor. Her grandfather's rocking chair was there and so was her mother's piano. It was getting dark, no one was there yet. She was getting hungry. She got herself a bowl and filled it with the soup and sat down at the table, waiting. Maya tasted the soup. It had no taste. It was just luke-warm water.

Framed

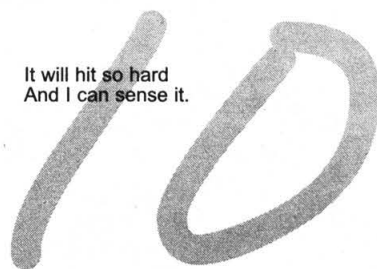
By Mark Caffrey

Strings and driving on
Never to have that happy face
A little piece of me

No recognition of the double figures
Like I said

Music to burst
On the manic mountain
Our funny cliff of life
Sad that I was too naïve
Only past and future

It will hit so hard
And I can sense it.



The Breath of Caroline

By Rea Frey

You look at the reflection in the mirror, wondering when that face stopped becoming your own. You trace the glass with woodlike fingers – wooden from all the still moments spent flexed over a piano's sleek, warm teeth – wooden from the way they scrub floors and toilets – yet mostly wooden from lack of touching the only thing you yearn for: your sweet, absent Caroline.

If she were there, the scent of bacon and ham would sizzle under the crack of the bedroom door; closed, because she knows you like it that way. The hum of her voice would be your only alarm clock, as you roll and stretch, breathing. She enters, apron strings dangling around her naked thighs, a spatula in her left hand. Coming your way. She'd dip her head over you, whispering, "Get up, sleepy man," and you couldn't help but watch her bottom saunter out your door, clad in the boxer shorts she gave you for Valentine's.

"I am a lucky man," you say.

Now, you stare at the unlined life: there are the whiskers, spot checked white and black over a moon-like face. The canvas is dark, though not as dark as Charlie's or LaJohn's – your fellow coworkers at the junior high school. Everyday, you wake to the same empty spot beside your pillow, the covers uncreased, disused. Most mornings you close your eyes and remember the whisper of her body next to yours – light, as though barely stamping the mattress with a long, curved spine, sinewy hamstrings, or her wonderful head of hair that kinked up like a

shredded sponge.

You will taste that bitterness that death brings to lovers, and spit at the age and lack of wisdom that tags along. The reflection staring back at you is not a great pianist's as you one day hoped – it is only a janitor's face and body, the work shirt, the slacks stained from months of mopping up cafeteria food. The strong forearms you see are from playing runs along the piano's keys, remembering her, and as of late, from mopping and cleaning the school floors. As you pivot your face left then right, you see the unmovable dust particles that seem stuck to your temples, your lips, and beneath your short, jagged nails. The markings of a janitor.

Everyday you get up is a reminder of what could have been, what should be. You see her face, you drink black coffee out of her favorite cracked mug, and play the music only sorrow brings. At 7:30, you're off to Tulip Grove, where you attempt to block out the screams of budding children by toting green, pliable earplugs.

"Morning, Mr. Sacks!"

"Heya, Big SI!"

"Lookin' good, Mr. Jan-i-tor!"

These are the only voices you hear through the sponge in your ears, these muffled, unimpressible voices, these unyielding whines you will hear until the close of the afternoon. How Suzanne had intercourse with Brian, how Vanessa hates Julianne, how the school's principal, Mr. Jenkins, is a waste of a man. You

will regard this gossip with less than nothing and attempt to busy yourself until lunch time. You mop the floors, dragging your trashcan and bucket behind you, avoiding children like oversized bullets, banging your knuckle on a locker door that you happen to miss, splitting the skin from knuckle bone to knuckle bone, cursing and mopping the halls.

On your break, you burrow into that ban-tam back office that bears a small gold plaque with your name across it – *Lamonte Sacks, Head Janitor*.

This break brings solitude, as you reach into your battered wooden desk to remove a walkman that holds a tape of Franz Liszt's *Etude*. You close your eyes and open the book of music stashed away behind some spare files. You sit erect as you've been taught to and press play on the small, yellow box that emanates the precious, coveted sounds. You place your fingers as in mock preparation of an object that is not really there. Your beloved piano. In your mind, you see her big, black body, her white teeth, pearly and wet against your hands, gracefully bending beneath the pressure. You move with the ease of a professional, but in your eyes that are closed there are tears and truth of a passion you will never pursue. You are a janitor. The song will soon be over and you will be with mop and bucket again, sponging up hallways, returning to an empty home, remembering the dreams of her, the breath of Caroline.

Ordinary Morning

By Mark Caffrey

11.40am
White, cold, quiet.
Not my bathroom.
Quiet.

Water dripping, kitchen sink.
Sleeping man.
Asleep.
I'm cold

There is no hand soap
I'll make some tea, then leave.

Gwei: Ghost

By C. P. Chang

Ai-i: aunt, any female elder, used as a title. Example: Chen Ai-i = Mrs. Chen. Chen Ai-i longs for a window in her Chinatown apartment that would look out on something other than the brick wall of the next building.

Su-su: uncle, any male elder, used as a title. Example: Chen Su-su = Mr. Chen. Cancer took Chen Su-su away from her two years ago.

Mao-tze: hat. She picks up her mao-tze and straightens her clothes, straightens her back and her shoulders, and prepares for her walk to the post office.

Hong-bao: red package, little red envelopes used to give money during gift-giving occasions. Chen Ai-i picks up the hong-bao from her table, destined for her nephew in Chicago. He calls often, but hangs up before the language barrier becomes too awkward.

Gao-xin: happy, literally "tall-heart". It makes her gao-xin to talk with the post clerks and with Mrs. Liu, who goes to the post office at the same times that Chen Ai-i does.

Peng-you: friends. She and her husband used to count Mrs. and Mr. Liu among their peng-you. Chen Su-su used to drag her out, to her own reluctant delight, to go ballroom dancing with the Lius.

Zou i zou: take a walk, literally "walk a walk." Instead of coming home directly from the post office as she usually does, today she decides to zou i zou.

Wo i dian pah: I'm a little scared. When Chen Ai-i held her husband's hand at the hospital bed after the first time of chemotherapy, she asked him, "How are you feeling?" and he whispered back, "Wo i dian pah."

Gu-dan: alone. She doesn't mind being gu-dan, because she can take care of the housework by herself, but the nights are sadly quiet.

Di-di: younger brother, or brother by marriage. Di-di = Ms. Chen's brother-in-law. Yesterday Chen Ai-i saw her husband in Di-di's face.

Mah: yell, scold. Di-di will often mah his son – Chen Ai-i's nephew – for not taking care of her, but he doesn't truly understand.

Jin-tian: today. Jin-tian Di-di decided that Chen Ai-i has been alone for long enough, and that she should move in with him.

Ma-fan: trouble, tedium. It's too much ma-fan, she protests. And it's too different from the way she's lived her life now that she's alone, but he doesn't relent.

Dwei: right, correct. Di-di is alone, too, and in her heart, Chen Ai-i knows he is dwei; it's best for both of them.

Lei: tired. After she comes home, she's very lei. She takes off her red shoes and her red mao-tze and lies on the couch to rest.

Yeng-jing: eyes. She is not crying, she tells herself, but as she lies on the couch, tears fill her yeng-jing.

Wan: play. Chen Ai-i remembers how her husband used to wan hide-and-seek with their nephew when they were both young, before their nephew grew up to speak only English.

Ching: clean. She will ching the apartment today, as she has done every day since she has been married and every day alone since Chen Su-su died.

Fang chi-lai: put away. But today she will fang chi-lai the clothes, the books, and the drawings that her husband used to own.

Lao-ren: old person. She used to tease Chen Su-su about being a lao-ren. Now she is the lao-ren.

Gwei: ghost. Chen Ai-i doesn't believe in gwei, but she desperately tries to feel Chen Su-su's spirit at night.

Hao bu hao?: is it okay? She asks the darkness gently, "Hao bu hao?" But she knows there can be no reply.

Bing-shiang: refrigerator. In the quiet of the night, she remembers that there is a picture on the bing-shiang of the two of them together.

Che-lai: rises. She che-lai from bed without turning the lights on, and goes to the bing-shiang.

Ai-ren: loved one, "my love." She takes the picture off the bing-shiang. She whispers to it, "Ai-ren, wo i dian pah."

Xin: heart. She sleeps with the picture in her hands, close to her, close to her xin.

No More Goldie Poem #1

By Chandra Brown

EVERYBODY TALKS OF THE CAGED BIRD
THE CAGED BIRD THIS THE CAGED THAT
WHAT'S ACTUALLY BEING CAGED SOUL, SPIRIT, MIND, SELF, HEART
ALL OF THESE FOR ME AND ONE MORE
I HAVE A WHOLE PERSON CAGED IN ME
HER NAME IS GOLDIE
I HAD HER BY MY SIDE
ALL MY LIFE AND MORE
I EVEN BELIEVE
SHE WAS IN THE WOMB WITH ME
PROTECTING ME
MAKING SURE
I
WOULD COME OUT OK
GOLDIE IS THE PRETTIEST CRE-
TURE
YOU WOULD EVER SEE
AND SHE WAS DEADLY
ONE LOOK AND
SHE HAD YOU DOING EVERYTHING
SHE WANTED YOU TO
AND THE CRAZY THING IS THAT
YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE IN CON-
TROL
OF YOU
BUT IT WAS ALL GOLDIE GUIDING
YOU
YOU WOULD GIVE HER ANYTHING
PLEASE TAKE THESE WORDS
AND BELIEVE ME
I KNOW I WAS THERE
I STAYED BACK AND WATCHED
SHE CAME OUT WHEN I WAS WEAK
AND I LET HER TAKE CHARGE
IF YOU TRIED TO HURT ME
IT WAS YOU THAT WAS HURT
INSTEAD
BUT HOW WAS IT SHE CAME TO BE
I LAID IN MY BED ONE NIGHT
AND I HAD A VISIT
FROM A FAMILY FRIEND
AND GOLDIE GOT MAD
THE SEED HE TOOK FROM ME
THE SEED HE TOOK FROM ME
THAT SEED WAS PLANTED
AND BLOSSOM INTO
THIS BEAUTIFUL FLOWER
NAMED GOLDIE
BUTT NAKED ON THE DANCE
FLOOR
SHE ENTERTAINED THE MASSES
ALL THEY WANTED WAS
A PIECE OF HER PRETTY ASS
BUT THEY COULDN'T PAY THE
PRICE
CAUSE ALL SHE WANTED WAS
THIER LIFE
I ONCE AGAIN SET BACK AND
WATCHED.
THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT
THEY WERE DOING BY LOVING
HER
THE THING IS THAT SHE DOESN'T
LOVE BACK
THAT WORD WOULDN'T
COME FROM HER MOUTH

UNLESS IF SHE KNEW THAT'S
WHAT YOU WANTED TO HEAR
IN THAT CASE IT WOULD BE
IT WAS DRY
LIKE A FAKED ORGASM
GOLDIE DOESN'T KNOW REAL
LOVE
WELL I TAKE THAT BACK
SHE'S ONLY LOVE ONE AND THAT
ONE IS ME
ONCE THAT WORD COMES FROM
YOUR MOUTH
SHE HURTS YOU MORE
AND I DID NOTHING TO STOP HER
I WASN'T HURTING I WASN'T EVEN
LIVING
MY SCARS WENT DEEPER THAN
GOLDIE
SHE WAS LIKE THE BANDAGE
THAT MADE EVERYTHING FEEL
BETTER
WITHOUT GOLDIE I FELT LIKE I
WAS
WALKING AROUND NAKED
WITH MY WOUNDS EXPOSED TO
THE WORLD
SO I CHOOSE NOT TO SAY A WORD
BECAUSE AGAIN I WASN'T HURT-
ING
IF I DID TAKE CHARGE
SHE WOULD COME OUT AND TAKE
OVER
HELL
I DIDN'T KNOW WHO I WAS TO BE
ME
WHO I BE
WHEN I LOOK IN THAT MIRROR
WHO BE THAT PERSON LOOKING
BACK AT ME
GOLDIE NOT ONLY WALKED INTO A
ROOM
SHE WAS THE ROOM
I STARTED WANTING TO COME
FROM THE BACK OF THE CLASS TO
THE FRONT
AND GOLDIE WASN'T HAVING THAT
I HAD TO SIT BACK AND STUDY
THE MIND OF GOLDIE
WHICH ISN'T ON ANY PAGE YOU
SEE
IT'S WAS HARDER
THAN I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE
YOU SEE SHE'S BEEN IN ME SINCE
ME
I STOPPED DANCING, I STOPPED
GOING OUT
I WOULD SIT IN A ROOM AND READ
THEN
I ALLOWED JESUS TO TALK TO ME
GOLDIE STARTED TO FADE AND I
CAME TO LIFE
BUT WHAT DID LIFE HAVE IN
STORE FOR ME
I BECAME STRONGER AND GOLDIE
WEAK
I WAS IN CHARGE OF ME
WHEN I LOOKED IN THE MIRROR
KNOW LONGER DID I SEE
THIS UGLY THING LOOKING BACK
AT ME
I LOOKED IN THE MIRROR AND

SAW BEAUTY
I READ TO STAY ALIVE
I WROTE TO LIVE
AND GOLDIE DIED
AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT
NOW I'M FIGHTING THIS BATTLE
WITHIN ME
TO KEEP GOLDIE WHEN SHE
NEEDS TO BE
BUT I MISS HER SO MUCH AND IT'S
HARD TO SEE
SOMETIMES I WANT TO TALK TO
HER
BUT I KNOW THAT CAN'T BE
I DROP TO MY KNEES AND PRAY
LORD PLEASE HELP ME
BUT DO I REALLY WANT HER
TO LEAVE COMPLETELY
NO
THAT'S WHY IT'S A POWER STRUG-
GLE
I GO TO SCHOOL AND NO ONE
SEES ME
IT'S GOLDIE THEY SEE
I TALK TO THEM AND SAY SHE'S
GONE AWAY
RIGHT THEN I'M INVISIBLE AND
GOLDIE IS INSIDE OF ME SAYING
I TOLD YOU SEE
ALL THEY WANT IS ME
I TRY NOT TO LISTEN AND GO ON
MY WAY
BUT I CAN'T HELP TO HEAR WHAT
SHE HAS TO SAY
IT'S LIKE THE SONG THAT TINA
MARIE MADE
HAVE YOU CAKE AND EAT IT TOO
I WANT TO BE ME AND STILL HAVE
GOLDIE
HOW DO YOU KILL SOMEONE SO
CLOSE TO YOU
WHEN SHE WAS THERE BEFORE I
CAME TO BE
WHEN SHE PROTECTED ME
OR DID SHE
SOMETIMES I FEEL THAT SHE TOO
EXPLOITED ME
EVEN WITH ALL OF THAT
I STILL LOVE OR SO
BUT I KNOW THAT SHE HAS TO GO
I WILL KEEP WRITING TO LIVE
AND LIVE TO WRITE
AND HOPELY STOP FIGHTING THIS
BATTLE WITHIN ME
MAYBE ONE DAY GOLDIE WILL
JUST GO TO SLEEP
AND LET ME BREATHE ON MY OWN
YEAH I NOW THAT'S TOO MUCH
LIKE RIGHT
SO I WILL JUST HAVE TO CONTINUE
TO FIGHT
WHICH IS THE BIGGEST ONE OF
MY LIFE
IT'S ACTUALLY FOR MY LIFE TO BE
ME
TO BE THE ME WITHOUT GOLDIE
QUESTION
WHO DO YOU THINK JUST WROTE
THIS PIECE
GOLDIE OR ME

One More Chance

By Tamika Toler

I need just one chance
to make things right
I struggle in this plight
but now my sight
has been cleared
and fear
is merely not an option
Concoctions have been made
even deals to pay
but I lay here on my knees
to plead
with rosery beads
and thinking
of all my insincere deeds
and I ask for one more chance
to enhance the better half of me
So I can be, someone you can be,
proud of
here my love

rub your anointed hand
to mend my broken parts
your love is the art
I push this cart
of urban decay
and do relays to win the race
but place last
this wrong cast has been placed on
me
and in the end all I can ask thee
is for one more chance
My bible is a bit dusty
but always in my heart
trust me
It must be
the life
I know I'll be here twice over
lower my head
kneel by the bed

All I need is one more chance
Glance on my surroundings
a world scared of diversity
Comradity has no means to me
this is going to be the death of me
Please bless what is left of me
Turning the vellum pages
hoping the words will become conta-
gious
Wishing I'd wisen with aging
Maintaining but losing me
Please Lord forgive me
Give me one more chance
Give me helping hands
Land on our Earth
and show me what life is really worth
Release this evil curse
Help me believe again
Please, give me one more chance.

Those Days

By Rea Frey

Lady used to hook her head in my elbows when she wanted a hug. We'd walk the streets where old ladies with canes sat inside their windows, guarding themselves from the world. Together, strolling the curved roads, her leash rubbed against my hands, tight, sweaty, and red.

"Nice day," the neighbors would say, eyeing Lady as if she might jump from my hands and rip at their legs and knees. We'd walk the valley, cutting through freshly mowed lawns and weedy ones. Occasionally, I'd take fistfuls of honey-suckle, anticipating the baked chicken, green beans and stuffing dinner would bring. Back in our yard, Lady would lick my palms as I watched caterpillars dance on the thin, wispy branches of our willow tree. If I ever climbed it, she'd wait patiently below, her brown mouth pulled back in a smile.

Two days later, she died under a pick-up truck. Chasing the red back-end, boys with shotguns looking to hunt deer.

"Lady," I whispered as her snout lunged for their tires. One paw, then the other. Like that. Her scream was a split belly, a squashed heart, a road-rashed tail. I ran after the truck. Nobody stopped to help her.

Michael was bused in from New York. He didn't have a father or siblings, and his mother was half a person really. Just anger and oiled up hair and scars from men. Michael sat next to my

desk, smelling of sweat and powder, dried spit cracking both corners of his mouth.

"You're going to teach Michael to read," Ms. Jordan told me. Being seven, I felt ready. Smelling Michael, I was not.

Everyday was tough. Throwing tantrums like he did, sitting in corners, stealing my lunch when I went to the bathroom.

"Bad boy," I'd whisper and subtly, when the teacher was at the blackboard, he'd flip up one ashy, middle finger, mumbling "fuck you," down his shirtsleeves.

In spring, class was hot. We'd write out our words – cat and dog and sheep and goat, with the broken pencils and cracked fans. I was just beginning to teach Michael to pronounce vowels.

"A," say "A," I'd mouth. Michael would flick his gray tongue out at me and I'd reach beneath our desks, crushing his hand in mine.

"Say A," I'd whisper, until he would, until his dry fingers bent backwards, until tears filled those bloodshot black eyes.

"I'm tellin'," he'd threaten, when I pinched those fingers so hard he'd suck the tips of them, nursing them like a child. But the whole year he never told and I never stopped working on the vowels. Because those were the small sounds of promise, the ones I hoped would take him somewhere else, beyond the classroom, beyond memory.

The rope swing was Aaron's.

"The rope swing's mine," he'd say, clutching his chest from asthma – three inhalers in the pockets of his jeans. His brother, Johnny played piano – most afternoons the lessons drifted out the windows and into our arms. We'd catch quarter notes, half notes, measures and concerts. Swinging on the rope, that knot hard and dirty between my legs. Even then, I knew Aaron had trouble breathing around girls. When I kissed him under the purple awning, he ran away from me, climbing up the stairs to his back door.

In his absence, I'd sit on the swing, getting higher than the metal fence, the pine trees, the sunshine. Resting my fantasies on that rope, I'd wait patiently for Aaron's return.

"I got string cheese," he'd say, coming back with loads of snacks in his arms – as if hunger had made him run away, not fear.

"Thanks, Aaron," I'd say, dismounting the knot that made my shorts damp, my hands red. "How about a kiss?"

I'd eat pounds of string cheese those days. Animal crackers, fruit roll-ups, and candy bars. Aaron, scared by the prospects, would always drop the food, leaving it still wrapped in the dirt, still cool and sweet and beautiful – running away from me, back to the net of his house, to the safety of the shade, back to learn the art of breathing.

Finding Myself

By Angelic Jones

Do You See Me? Can someone see me now?

Good, 'cause once upon a time I never saw myself.

The only things I saw were expectations of me – my mother wanted me to be a lady i.e. a little white girl with lots of knowledge

about the wrong things. She couldn't see that ingenuity will get you killed and I couldn't see me 'cause I was crossing my legs too tight. For a while I couldn't

see me 'cause when I looked in the mirror my skin was so light and red and my hair so straight that I could pretend and did

pretend that I wasn't part of my race and all was gravy 'cause maybe Amy was really my friend and not just using me to flout daddy's authority.

For 'bout a year or two I definitely couldn't see me 'cause they was trying to mold me into an image of an oppression that I didn't belong to. Got to college and got a clue that all that previous shit warn't mine, baggage did not belong to me. One day I saw me, dug me, and ran to lop off my hair.

cut out that perm-chemical worm infesting me with a matrix of information I had digested about my self-worth. I saw me as beautiful without the makeup

and the fake hair and, sadly, without the friends – they couldn't understand that to love me I had to remember the black that the present forgot, the centuries of native that we ditched when we thought that maybe we would have a chance to be free.

just did not see that free meant dead and forgotten. Like a dog in search of a bone I dug it up with piercings, nappy hair and no clothes haunting the image worshippers with my impropriety but realizing that my irreverence for the institution was what you needed to see, what I needed to see to know that my name was not Jones, but neither was it Adams.

Do you see me? Can someone see me now?

Don't look if you're afraid 'cause what I'm bringing ain't for the faint of heart or the weak of resolution. What I'm bringing is the love, peace, joy, and happiness of self-revelation

or the bitter death reserved for the provincial. Stand up when I call your name or perish with the rest. My time has come, so be prepared.

Untitled

By Alyssa Soetebier

13
Zoning out into my world of mis-realities. The sound track of my life is literal because I really have a song for every-thing I try.

These lyrics and tunes I hear mold and provide support for my arguments.

They justify the things I do. It makes sense the way I hear it

on all those tapes.

An idea I had once was that I don't really love music.

I just use it to escape that itch that I can't reach is sitting, sinking into the world of beats. Scratching has been made impossible.

The flowing of things I hear has inspired me

to be the real me.

To show everyone who I really am. To wash away my mask today, leave it on the corner for some other kind of social disorder to wash it away to another day.

The Man, The Gun, The Myth

By B. Southerland

His love is destroyed by his beliefs.
Shooting at the world for his advancement.
The applause cuts through the air as
the hero is destroyed by all who view
with closed eyes.
They dare not face him with fists or

words.
For their power diminishes in the
shadow of an automatic killer.
Their voices then are echoed through-
out streets in every town.
Their faces make them icons for the
morning papers.

Their names cover the ground in the
same way that their victim's blood did
the night before.
These are the things making him a
legend.
In the end, this certifies the belief in
the man, the gun, and the myth.

For Troy

By Natalie Hill

We would sit at Hanny's
Monday thru Sunday
section
sharing packs of Camels
buying 90 cent cups of coffee and
that would buy time on the jukebox
"Piano Man"

the corner of Broad and Dodge
the same booth smoking

"Jack and Diane"

You would cheer me up Sunday nights with a six pack of Smirnoff
Ice
or a pencil drawn rendition of Yoko and John, hands stroking
breasts

Or what about skipping sixth hour
driving your 1989 teal Ford Pickup

Applications of Botany

I'm wearing your sunglasses, Troy
and the local radio station plays

I haven't written a letter dear Troy
for over two months

I haven't accepted your shaved head
the MK-40 you hold in your right hand

The Forgotten Never Sees

The Memorial Wall

By Kristine M. Kruse

Daddy look it's a parade!
Not a parade Jena, no not a parade
Then what Daddy, what?
A protest Jena, a war protest
What's a protest Daddy?
Oh I don't know Jena, I don't know

Daddy holds Jena's little hand tightly as
he guides her down the street and away from the
increasing population of protesters. Jena watches
the people as she passes by with shinning awe
filled eyes, unable to comprehend the world
around her. At this moment her eyes clearly
betray her innocence.

Daddy can we stay here with all the happy peo-
ple?

They aren't happy Jena, no honey they
aren't happy

Then what are they daddy, what?

They are angry Jena, they are sad
Why are they sad daddy?

Oh I don't know Jena, I don't know

Jena's eyes gloss over empathetically as
she watched the people on the street, feeling sad
and angry for them. Daddy looked down at his lit-
tle daughter and into her big glossy blue eyes and
he wondered what the future would bring for her.
What would happen as she grew older in a coun-
try at war?

Daddy look that man has a cape!

Not a cape Jena, no not a cape
Then what daddy, what?

It's a flag Jena, it's the flag
Why is he wearing it like that Daddy?

He's a protester Jena, that's what they
do.

Daddy looked nervously at the stop light
as he was waited for it to change. He wanted to
walk across the street and away from the most
condense part of the crowd. Jena watched the
crowd trying to make sense of them as they grew
ever louder.

Daddy these are protesters?

Yes Jena, Yes they are

Why do they yell daddy, why?

They believe in something Jena, they
believe

What do they believe in Daddy?

Peace Jena, they believe in peace

They were about to cross the street when
the sirens screeched and the lights of police cars
filled the street before them. Daddy pulled Jena
back from the curb. Tears of fear welled up in
Jena's eyes.

Daddy should I be scared?

I don't know Jena, I just don't know

Why are the police her Daddy, why?

To keep things here in order Jena, to
keep things in order

What's order Daddy?

A good way to behave Jena, a good way
to behave

It was then that the shots sounded, and
at first Daddy couldn't tell if it was the police or the
protesters. He threw his body against his little girl
and wrapped his arms around her. There was a
popping noise and a zing in the air, but with all of
the screaming his senses felt numb. Blood
smeared down the front of her and him, and
Daddy knew he had been too late. The protesters
ran in all directions. Daddy fell to his knees and

watched the scene of madness but couldn't com-
prehend. He imagined Jena shriek in terror, as he
held her limp form in his arms.

Daddy look it's a monster!

Yes Jena, yes it's a monster

But who is the Monster daddy, who?

Us or them Jena, it's us or them

Well is it us or them Daddy?

Oh Jena I don't know, I just don't know...

Daddy's face was alabaster when the
ambulance workers took his little girl out of arms;
he did not hear their words, nor the chants of the
protesters gathering once again on the other side
of the square, he thought about the papers and
what Jena would say.

Look Daddy it's my picture!

Yes Jena it's your picture Jena.

What's it say Daddy, what?

The headline says "Daddy says why

Jena?"

What's it about Daddy?

It's about innocent victims, it's about you
Jena.

Daddy stood above a grave for Jena he
dropped six red roses on the freshly turned earth.
Remember me Daddy!

I will remember you Jena, I will

Will others remember me Daddy, will they?

No Jenna, no honey.

Why not Daddy?

The death of innocence is never put on the
memorial wall Jena, no honey innocence is a for-
gotten casualty of war.

What Frank Told Me

By Natalie Hill

a cento

I'm having a real day of it
Washing the world down with rye and
Coca-Cola and the news
Eating Swiss chocolates afterwards
I'm smoking a Camel now

In subway stations and latrines
If Kenneth were writing this he would
point out how art has changed

I am a microcosm in your macrocosm
You are as intimate as a "cup" of
vodka

You never come when you say you'll
come but on the other hand you do
come

I think you are wonderful

Secret Service

By Helen Failing

You came swiftly and longingly into my
house
and went to my room and ripped off
the bed sheets.
You swore I had another in there, a
secret
in my room which I hid to conceal the
beauty
of myself. Why would you think that
odd?
Then I stumbled into your arms, my
voice

thick with the sounds of the tremors of
your voice
that resonated in my full but emotion-
less house.
I felt your finger trace down the oddity
of my once broken nose that I blotted
with the sheets
and they burned burgundy while hid-
ing my beauty
that disappeared. How I got broken is
a secret.

Maybe I could share, but can you

keep a secret?
The frog in your throat concealed what
you voiced
as your opinion. Then you said I was
beautiful
and that you were sorry you wrecked
my house
and you'd buy me new white cotton
sheets
to match my white cotton panties,
though how odd

is it to wear those to bed. You're odd
in your boxers that hide the secret
of your manhood between the silk
sheets
you favor. I grew up and pit my voice
against my inner emotions, stolen
from the house
so that they were lost – no more
beauty.

I managed to change what I imagined
as beautiful
as I pushed you aside. It's quite odd
how we have learned so much. Is this

a bottomless house
or one so bountiful as to hide the
secrets
in the crevices of your body in a voice
so tinny that it gets muffled by the
sheets?

I clasped the burning white cotton
sheets
between my praying hands. My voice
was beautiful
while I sang. Then I lost as my voice
cracked. Your hand on my throat felt
odd,
as if you wanted to close off the secret
that I kept hidden in my sheets, my
house.

You finally gave voice to why you felt
so odd to me.
Because your white cotton sheets
weren't beautiful enough
to tie in my secret house whose doors
were open to you.

The First 10 Seconds Of The Last 10 Seconds Of Everything

By Tim Lotesto

Second one:

We're in the front yard. It's one of those greeting
card days when the sun is orange and hugs your
skin as you recline in a lawn chair and breathe
deep through your nose. My daughter in front of
me. She's crouched down to a squat, inspecting
a blade of grass closely. Her pink shirt and shorts
a shade darker behind the lenses of my sun-
glasses. Her profile is one of deep concentration,
bottom lip bit and everything.

Second two:

Molly's head snaps to her right suddenly to look
across the street. I can feel my skin browning,
and I shake one of the swimsuit straps off my
shoulder.

Second three:

She yells "Mommy!" though she could be yelling
"Molly!" Lately she loves saying her own name.
When she walks into a room, she screams her
name with those tiny lungs in a screeching falset-
to, announcing her presence to the world. She
screams something now, delight in her voice, and
I cock my chin up slightly.

Second four:

Molly stands and leaps forward in one fluid
motion. The way only children can move. Her thin

leg outstretched in front of her like a dancer. The
blades of grass reach up to her. I know it's just the
breeze that makes them stand, but I like to think
they're impatiently waiting for her to arrive.

Second five:

Of course there's a car. It is every mother's night-
mare that there's a car. It rounds the corner fast
enough that the body shifts on its wheels. I yell
Molly's name now, just like she does, too high, too
loud. Her pale, bare foot lands and takes off
again.

Second six:

I can almost hear Molly's foot sizzle as the soft
sole presses against the scorching blacktop off
the curb.

Second seven:

There's a dog strolling through the yard across
the street. I can see it as I sit up and take a breath
to scream my daughter's name again. The reclining
chair beneath my squeaks. Molly loves dogs,
loves the way they nuzzle their face into her neck.
She pets them with both hands, gentle like she is
with dolls. Like I am with her. And then the white
car blocks the dog from view.

Second eight:

There's a delirious thunk when they meet. I find

that I'm standing. Somehow the car has popped
Molly up off the ground and she's sideways
and I shift forward and start to run. My sunglass-
es slip down on my nose and Molly does a spin in
the air like a Frisbee as the tires skid.

Second nine:

She's always been graceful, but not now.
Sometimes I catch her humming to herself in her
room and twirling herself around until she's dizzy.
Holding her hands above her head and lightly
stretching her neck. Pointing her toes, almost
floating. I don't know who taught her these
things. She spins in the air again and begins to
drop and it's not at all like a Frisbee or like any-
thing except like a body. I'm running with my arms
out as if I'll catch her.

Second ten:

Too many sounds happen at once. Molly slaps
the street. The dog lifts its head and won't stop
barking. The tires that were skidding to a halt are
skidding new now, tearing up the street to race
away. And there's a sound coming from my throat
that I've never heard, that I never want to
hear again.

Pep Talk

By Angelic Jones

I rock fellas like Rocafella on virtue of the story I'm yellin'-let me tell you about glory, not gold and unmask the lies hidden behind the Benz and the glitterin' bootyz. I may seem loony because I don't see Black like that, so I don't see you cuz I'm a queen and you're a dream—A mirage of cars and honeys chasin' money. You playin' god hiding behind your fears and insecurities. I'm here to be your savior. You'll be consuming my flavor-revolution's juicy and everybody wants a piece of the reign I will claim over future nations. Royalty's bred in generations. I'm searching for kings and queens by my side not a nigga wit a ride thinkin' he done won the man's game cuz he got a little dough and a little fame

not knowing he's still a slave cuz they label own you lock, stock, and barrel down your golden throaght. Got a little carol for you-hahaha they're killin' you softly, stealthily taking you out using the methods of uncle sam str8 brainwashing you into believing that that wack form of Black hustlers and gold diggers is the truth. But the reality is so much simpler than the way they been pimpin' ya-the shit's played out. No doubt from the 50's to 2003 we been struggling for change but the foot is still in our ass. Our face is pressed against the glass. Change don't come from the gold pieces we count in our sleep like they were delectable sheep, manna from god-our daily sustenance. You like why all the fussin' bitch. I'm rude, I'm mad, and I'm tired of what I

see. I find no royalty to stand by my side yall run and hide so I write to breed revolution-to flush you out, to make you mad to make you see that the media brainwash we participate in is like the weed we bleed 'cause we swear that that shit's staying true to ourselves like we swear rappers and pro ballers ain't some white man's hoe—gotta get the dough, gotta get the cars, can't stand the truth. We been getting rimmed for centuries with no lube and the blood shed won't stop there 'cause our pride is long gone so I will be steady rockin' you 'til you're burnin' up, sweating and sick to your stomach, so sick that you will ram your fist out of the belly of the avaricious whale to stand with pride again. Now that's what I am talking about.

Sunday

By Harold Holt

Makisha prepared sandwiches while her husband and his friends initiated another round of rowdy cheering from the living room. Pre-marriage Makisha would go to church on Sundays and listen to the Good and Righteous Brother J. J. Redbone, III. Lemar, her newlywed husband of barely a year, had attended service with her a few times; but for the past few months, every Sunday had become Super Sports Sunday, and post-marriage Makisha couldn't seem to fathom where she fit in anymore. She found herself constantly reminded that there were parts of Lemar's world that would probably never include her. *But wasn't that okay?* After all, she wasn't his Siamese twin; but sometimes she felt so estranged that her husband and his friends may as well have been aliens chortling over their plans for world domination.

When Lemar was with the guys, he smiled more, talked more, and even seemed to have a better sense of humor. When Makisha and Lemar were alone, he was kind, generous and sentimental, but he took things more seriously and tended to react with a moderate sense of urgency. He watched what he said and always seemed to say the perfect thing at the perfect moment. With the guys, Lemar spoke more freely and unrehearsed, more relaxed.

Makisha retrieved the mayonnaise and mustard jars, all the while remembering when she used to tell her girlfriends, *I'll never be any man's maid*. But this was the only way she could think of to contribute, in some way, to the bliss that Lemar experienced on Sports Sundays.

There was another outburst of cheerful rowdiness from the living room, which meant someone had scored another touchdown. Makisha had learned Lemar's friends through repetition, so she custom-made their sandwiches accordingly: Cyrus, or 'Cy' as they called him, liked liverwurst on plain white bread; Bartholemeu, called

'Be-Bop' for short, liked any kind of cold cuts as long as there was white American cheese and mayonnaise; Trevor, nicknamed 'Ratman,' preferred thin turkey slices with Swiss cheese, peppers and mayonnaise; and finally Lemar, who the guys referred to as 'L-Train,' liked corn beef & mustard on wheat. Makisha positioned the sandwiches on the saucers like diamonds then she neatly sliced them from the top corner to the bottom, cutting the diamond shapes into two triangles.

She carried the sandwiches into the living room and noticed that Lemar's favorite beer commercial was on, the one with the two girls mud wrestling. Fortunately for Makisha, their cable TV subscription hadn't kicked in yet, so the controversial advertisement aired sans the racy ending. While the men clowned and cracked 'yo mamma' jokes on each other, Makisha set down the sandwiches and thought about just leaving, but Lemar wasn't noticing her, and she *wanted* him to notice her... So she used the privileged information at her disposal.

"So what's up wit' my boo and his peeps? Everything cool?" she asked. After drawing their attention, she spoke to each one individually; she faced her husband first. "How you feeling, L-Train? Comfy in that chair? Need another pillow?"

Lemar looked stunned for a second, then he quickly retorted, "No, I'm fine, baby."

Makisha turned to Cyrus. "Can you get your eats on with that, Cy? Want me to stack another layer on there?"

Cyrus shook his head. "This is fine."

She addressed Bartholemeu: "Be-Bop, I hooked you up with some hot head-cheese this time."

He replied, "That's cool, Makisha."

Finally, she addressed Trevor: "Don't forget your pop, Ratman. I just took it out of the freezer, so it should be cold and slushy by now."

"Trevor replied, "That's good. Thanks, girl."

Makisha waited for a time; she wasn't really sure what she was waiting for. When the game came back on, the men all resumed placating their electronic deity, and Makisha felt forgotten in every sense of the word. She entered her bedroom, closed the door and dumped herself onto the bed while fighting back a tear. She felt like a complete idiot, having called the men by the sacred, private names they called each other. More importantly, she felt alone.

There was a knock at the bedroom door. Before Makisha could do anything, Lemar walked in, closed the door behind him, then scooped his wife up into his arms and cradled her lovingly. When he finally placed her feet back on the floor, she caught him grinning and glowing heartily, like the proud father of a newborn.

"Hey, what's with all this?" she asked.

"To thank you. The love you show me makes me a giant among men. The way you put up with my boys and whatnot, you're the sweetest thing in my life, girl, and I knew that long before we jumped the broom, you feel me?"

Makisha cried, her joy overflowing. Lemar added, "Let's do something together next Saturday and Sunday."

Makisha couldn't believe what she was hearing. "What about next week's game?" she asked.

"One of the guys will tape it for me."

Just then, Ratman shouted from the living room, "L-Train! These boyz clownin' in here, dog!"

Man and Wife looked into each other's eyes and simultaneously burst into laughter. "You better go," Makisha giggled. She kissed her sweet husband's cheek then watched him exit and rejoin his friends, knowing now that he'd only be with them for a short while.

She

By Helen Failing

Tumultuous, temptuous, delicious her scent walks in the door before her presence wafts in.

She flounces her rampant curls over her smooth shoulder, succulent in scarlet strapless silk.

Rambunctious without being ridiculed, belle of the ball she isn't; yet he sees her beauty a-plenty.

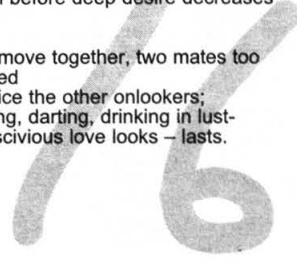
The connection of emerald and sapphire enormous eyes effectively applied to their purpose of catching him.

She traces tips through hair—his thick and shiny, hiding an eye as he brings his hard hands up.

Embracing, emboldened, love embla-

zoned though labored lungs struggle to pull breath before deep desire decreases life.

They move together, two mates too aroused to notice the other onlookers; dancing, darting, drinking in lust-lascivious love looks—lasts.



Manipulation

By Angelic Jones

"Cash rules everything around me, CREAM get the money, dollar-dollar bills yall."

At fifteen years of age, Wu Tang's hip-hop mantra was running through my head because my new best friend put it there. I met her at the beginning of high school, in my formative years. My mother had sheltered me, keeping me close to home, and there were many things that I did not know about people.

Angel helped me to explore life on new terms. I hung out after school, hopping in strange men's cars and heading up to the South side's Evergreen Plaza (affectionately called Eva Black) hoping to be noticed by grown men. We walked from store to store in uniform skirts strategically rolled up almost to our butts pretending to be grown, but everyone looking saw young hoochies.

Our relationship with one another was precarious at best. She taught me the things that casually floated past my naïve mind. I watched her disobey her parents and sneak around having sex with boys-attempting to rule the world with bravado. This prevented her from completing her schoolwork. Our friendship was sustained by my

book knowledge, helping her to complete assignments on time, and her world knowledge shared.

Eventually, Angel was ruling the world of a small college town with her large tits and big hips through stripping; I was off earning two degrees. We had lost touch with each other when she was kicked out of our all girl school. She sought me out after four years to renew our relationship. I was soon driving from Champaign, IL. every weekend to learn everything that I didn't know about big cities and the people who lived there. I traveled to bars with her and watched as men paid for her time and attention; I waited patiently.

I considered for a long time that this was not the nature of friendship. I believed that friends went to the movies, art galleries, and planned big successes with one another. Angel was slowly losing my allegiance while collecting her cash.

I got an education so that I could make something of myself. I did not intend to be a prostitute or a stripper, nor considered one. But truly, as my mother always said, there is guilt by association. I could not hide my derision of Angel's life nor could others. Her boyfriend complained about her and assumed that I was guilty of the same

gold-digging, prostituting behavior.

Angel held the stigma of the not so independent slut. Her brazen attitude did not disguise her misappropriation of people's time and attention. I loved my friend, but I felt that my time and intellect were too precious to waste embroiled in foolish battles and chasing trifling dreams. My good feelings for Angel evaporated as quickly as the money she collected daily. I finally withdrew from Angel when I accepted that, with my increasingly negative thoughts about her ways, I could not consider myself her friend.

When Angel and I became friends she would prompt me to sing Wu Tang's song while musing that she had taught me everything that I needed to know about life-she had. I realized years later that cash ruled everything around her, all the time. I learned that she had never been the type of friend that I imagined she could be and I could never be the friend she deserved if I could not participate in life in a similar manner to her. Life is not about give and take, but about mutual respect and enjoyment of things on all levels.

When You Lend a Hand

By Robert Richley

I have a simple, short story to tell.
A man was pushing a stone up a hill.
Someone passed by and shook his head.
?How silly,? he thought and continued on ahead.

Another man stopped and watched a while.
?You're not getting far!? he yelled with a smile.
He too left and continued on his merry way.
He had other things to accomplish that day.

The pusher continued to grunt and groan
As he tried to move the heavy stone.
Many people came and many went.
Soon the day was nearly spent.

A man came by in a hurry to get home
When he saw the man pushing the stone.
Without a thought or the slightest yell,
He put his shoulder to the stone as well.

In little time, without a single groan,
They moved up the hill that heavy stone.
Inside a hole where the stone had laid
Were stones of sapphire, gold and jade.

?Go ahead and take your pleasure.
From my hidden, buried treasure,?
Said the man to the one who had come to his aid.
?You're worthy of my sapphire, gold and jade.?

Sitting in Union Station Waiting for the Train to Ann Arbor

By Lee Kitzis

The downstairs bar's dimly lit w/ pictures of old trains vintage pay toilet 5¢ signs and Royal Crown Cola ads the regulars pounding their hands on the bar talking about ass kickings

The last wail of sappy music from above Old businessmen everyday Metra riders meeting up for their pint and nowhere stories big Texas toothed grins and harsh phlegmy laughs the ones

that say I voted for Nixon

"So I got into a fight w/ my daughter," he says

"I've got a story for you when you come back," he says

Seeing As The Lord Sees

By Robert W. Richley

They stared as she walked in,
At this woman of renowned sin.
What was she doing here?
They watched as she drew to him
near.
Didn't he know her reputation?
She was a known woman of tempta-
tion.
She poured on him perfume and oil.
With her own tears, she cleaned his
feet of soil.
Surely not her, oh Lord, they thought,
For she was a woman they sold and
bought.
"Your sins are forgiven," he said,
"And no longer along this wrong path
tread."

"Go to meet Saul," the Lord had said
to him,
"Restore sight to the eyes that I made

dim.
Upon his head your hands do lay.
Go now, be on your way."
But, Ananias was full of trepidation.
He knew of this man Saul and his rep-
utation.
Saul killed the saints without hesita-
tion.
How could he be called to restoration?
"Surely not him, oh Lord God."
Ananias said.
"Through him many to my way will be
led.
His sins are forgiven now," the Lord
said.
"No more upon this path will he ev'r
tread."

When she walked in, how I forgot this
all:
The stories of Mary and Paul.

"Why was she here?" I thought.
"Certainly not of the Lord to be
taught."
I imagined her bad reputation
And how she fell into grave tempta-
tion.
How was I to know it was rape
And with her life she did barely
escape.
She came here to erase the guilt and
blame.
Yet, all I did was mock and put to
shame.
Surely not her, Lord, was my grave
mistake.
Why in her need did I forsake?
Forgive of me this sin, I plea,
Help me not to judge people so
wrongly!

The Sermon

By Chandra Brown

We as men run to those things we should run
from, and run from those things we should run to.
I never knew which way I was running, until I
reached my destination. This day the sun didn't
want to let the moon shine on us. It was 9pm and
the sun should have been winking good-bye for
the night, but that was not the case. We didn't
complain, because we were children and that
meant we could stay out longer.

I was as fine as could be and the other men
and women alike hated that about me. They
wanted what I had, and that which I had was not
much, but they wanted it still. You never know
what powers you possess until, they possess you
and by then it is too late.

As I grew into a man, I wanted those things
that men had money, a car, and a good woman.
The money and woman would come later, but I
had the flyass ride. It was souped up and had all
the latest shit. I had to have the dice hanging
from the rearview mirror, with blue fur around the
stirring wheel. The seats were white leather with
blue pimp stripes to match the car of course. I
almost forgot to mention that it was a convertible,
which made the honeys go wild. I had gansta
white walls tires and the sounds. It had the latest
8 track system. The other cats still had only a
radio.

I do believe that they made that song about
me and my ride. "Diamonds in the back, sun roof
top, digging in the scene with the gansta lean,
woo woo. Now you might not have a great big
Cadillac, gansta white walls, TV antenna in the
back, you may not have a car at all, but remem-
ber brothas and sistas, you can still stand tall."
But I had all that, I was how you say today, the
shit and I made everybody smell it.

Before I met your mother I was with this
woman that wanted to give me the world. She did
anything for me and I loved her so. Because of
her I started pimping. She got the girls, and I
made them women. We traveled all over the
country and we were it, but we were it together. I
needed her and she needed me. Men used to
come up to me and asked me, "How can I be like
you. I want to be a true player."

I would tell them, I can't teach you how to be
something that you are not. I can only tell you
that life is good and if you find the right women, it
to will just come to you. A player is not what he
has, but who he is. But my woman took sick and
I too felt her pain. I gave up my life to take care
of her and when she died apart of me went with
her. I grew tired and there was no life in me, or at
least that is what I thought.

I was walking and came up to a rose garden
and once I bent down to take in the beauty of this
flower, it was nothing but weeds. I couldn't see
past the weeds. I would adjust my eyes, because
I know I saw roses. The more I focused the more
the weeds grew. I sat there in this pile of weeds
and smelt roses, so I picked them up to take in
the smell. I had on a black suit and it was cov-
ered with dirt. I must have looked a mess; I know
I felt that way. Then I met your mother.

She was nothing, like I have known before. I
can tell you this, she was an angel sent from
above to show me the way, the right way. She
wore a pink petty coat dress that had two red
roses sowed into it. I can honestly say that it was
her that I smelled. It was in her, I saw the man I
could be.

I was still pretty down and she gave me a
book and told me, that in this book I will find all the

answers to the questions I had. It was the bible
and on the first page I started my journey, "In the
beginning God created the heavens and the
earth." I read until my eyes were tired. I would
sleep and get up and start again. It took me three
months to finish it and once I was done I read it
again and again and again.

And in that book I realized that, where I am is
where I should be. God created man in his own
image, so I am apart of God. God is love, so I am
love; God is peace, so I have peace. Everything
that I am, I am because of God. He was with me
when I was doing wrong, trying to lead me to
right, but it was me that didn't want to be right. I
didn't believe that God loved me, but God is love,
and his love has always been with me. The rea-
son I'm telling you this is because I don't want to
you miss your blessing, I want you to be blessed,
for God is your blessing.

I thought I was missing out on something, but
I wasn't missing out on anything. I thought I had
everything, but I had nothing, because I didn't
have the man above in my life. Now I found my
way and I have a good life. I don't have any
regrets because I had to go through the storm to
see the light. Now, what you have to do is find
you own way and from the looks of it, you have a
long way to go.

I will give you this book that saved my life and
when you are ready open it and you will find all of
the answers to your own questions, as I did. I
won't tell you when and where to open it, you
have to figure that out on your own, but I will tell
you that once you do, you will never be the same.
So it's up to you. It's time for me to go now I have
a sermon to preach and know that I love you for
all you are now, and all you will become.

Sober

By B. Southerland

Today would have been the best day
of my life
If I would have stayed in bed
Only then would I have felt like some-
body
Or at least a little less dead
The weekends speed up my aging
As one minute steals three days
From my hands, I feel nothing
And my eyes seem a little dazed

This is not a withdrawal from alcohol
But a dismissal from my surroundings
As these days grow older

I move towards something else
Or could it be someone else
Tearing me apart from myself
My heart need not bleed
For those who feed,
Off my weaknesses and insecurities

And for once in my life
I need no outside influence
I can stay focused on my own
There is nothing left to distract me
Therefore, once again I say
This is not a withdrawal from alcohol
But a dismissal from my
surroundings

18

Old Lady

By Chandra Brown

I had my daughter when I was twenty-four years old by a man sixteen years my senior. Our daughter was an angel sent from heaven and I will never forget the day this was proven to me.

Her father and I separated a year after she was born and we remained close for the sake of our daughter. Both of us wanted to be important parts of her life, so we decided to raise her together yet separately.

As my daughter grew, I noticed certain things about her. She was a very slow child, not slow as in brain slow, but slow as in slow. She would take forever to do anything. I started calling her "my old lady." She reminded me of someone's grandmother.

One night after I was released from the hospital my girlfriends wanted to take me out. I had been in the hospital for three weeks and they wanted to celebrate and all I wanted to do was lie down and rest. They were going on and on that I should go out. I was tired and resisted until I just couldn't convince them otherwise so I went out.

The club was packed. It was an old warehouse that was transformed into a club. The ceilings were fifty feet high with expose brick walls. There were about twenty barstool high tables with four bar stools at each table. On one wall there was a bar as long as the club. It seated forty people along the bar.

When we entered the smoked filled club, the old school hit "smoking on the piece pipe" was pumping through the speakers and the club was alive with energy. You could feel the vibrations of the music from your feet to your head.

As soon as we entered, my friends couldn't resist the urge to dance. All I wanted to do was go home, but it was too late. I knew it was going to be an all nighter. I headed straight for the bar and ordered a cranberry juice. As I sat there drinking I wondered why in the hell did I once again allow my friends to guilt trip me into coming out when this woman approached me.

She was a very attractive woman 5'7 about 150lbs or less. She was light skinned with sandy brown hair. She looked as though she was mixed with something other than black. She wore these goofy cat eyed glasses. They took so much away from her beautiful face.

I never knew her name, but I will always remember what she told me. She came up to me and said, "I don't like what your thinking." I gave her a look as if to say I'm not in the mood to be bothered tonight I don't care how good you look.

She went on to say "Why do you let them guilt trip you all the time." I couldn't believe my ears. "Who are you?" I replied. "I came to tell you that you won't be happy until you leave your girlfriend. She doesn't love you. The only reason why you are still together is because of her insecurities." Ok now I'm pissed off. How do she know what's going on with my girlfriend and me.

At the same time I knew that I wasn't happy and I did want out, but how could this complete stranger know this as well. I started to listen and we talked for what seemed like hours. She then hit a cord when she talked about my daughter. She told me that I call my daughter an old woman. I said, "she is an old woman because I had her by a old man."

This woman went on to say that an old woman reincarnated herself into my daughter. The fact that I had her by an old man has nothing to do with my daughter. She told me that my daughter moves slowly because she knows

what's in store for her and she's in know rush to get there. I sat there with my mouth opened. Just then my girlfriend came up to me and when I turned away this woman was gone.

I told my girlfriend what just happened and she didn't believe me. Hell I didn't believe me until years later. When everything that woman told me came to light. I was living in Waukegan Illinois and I had just come in from work when I received a call that changed my life.

My sister called and the first thing I noticed was the nervousness in her voice when she said, "are you sitting down" I said, "no" she told me to sit down, she had something to tell me. The first thing that came to mind was my father something had happened to my father. I told her to tell me I didn't want to sit down.

"Chan, Moonie was shot" my body felt like that famous slow motion scene in the Matrix. My legs gave out in slow motion it felt like an eternity to fall on my knees to the floor. I gave out this scream that shook the house and every one in it. "No, no, no, not my baby. She's protected by an old lady, not my baby." I keep screaming until my friend took the phone from me. My sister spoke to her and as they were talking I headed for the door.

My friend grabbed me and said that I wasn't able to drive. We walked to the car and the world was in this same crazy slow motion. I wanted to run, but my feet could barely walk. I took giant steps, but made baby steps and all I was thinking about was that conversation in the bar that night. Maybe I was drinking something other than cranberry juice when she told me my baby knew what was in store for her. Maybe that night was something that I made up in my mind. All I knew was that my baby needed me and I couldn't get there fast enough. Usually it takes about 45 minutes to get to Chicago, but I swear to you that it felt more like hours.

You could see people in their cars singing and laughing and I sat stiff as a board. My friend was talking to me but for the life of me I can't remember one word of that conversation. I couldn't hear anything, but the sound of my baby calling me. I started seeing a movie of her life flash before my eyes. Everything from her sucking on my breast, to drinking out of a bottle, to drinking out of a cup all played in my mind. I remember her first words, which were, "I'm hungry." When she started talking I was so excited since she didn't say her first words until she was 19 months.

We finally made it to the hospital and I jumped out of the car before it came to a complete stop. It was like a scene in the movies. Me running in the hospital shouting at the nurse behind the desk "Where is my daughter! She was shoot!" Lawrence her father heard screaming and came over to comfort me. "Chan she's ok. I was with her in the ambulance and she was comforting me."

I couldn't believe what he was saying how could she comfort him when she was shot. "Chan we were in the ambulance and I was crying and she said, 'don't cry daddy I'm ok' I looked at her and couldn't make another tear fall. She grabbed my hand and started singing." I didn't understand what he was saying to me. We sat there holding each other waiting for her to come out of surgery. It was like we had never broken up.

"I still need to know what happened." Lawrence took a deep breath and told me what happened.

"I was late picking Moonie up from the sitter, because I couldn't get my car door to close. I called Shay and told her I would be late and she said its ok that Moonie was on her way to the candy store. As Moonie was walking down the stairs to the store a car came by shooting out the window. Moonie was hit in the abdomen and that's all I know right now. The police were here questioning me and Shay and they want to talk to Moonie to see if she remembers anything." I cried more and Lawrence held me tighter.

She came out of surgery and we were waiting for her in her room. When she came in she had a tube going through her nose down her throat. She had two IV's one in both arms. She was sleep and even though she had all those things going in and coming out of her body she was a perfect angel.

Her being shot was headline news. While I was outside talking to a reporter a lady came up to me. She asked me was I the mother of the gunshot victim. I told her that I was and she put her arms around me and started crying. I thought that something happened to my baby while I was outside so I tried to break free of this woman when she grabbed me. "I'm sorry I didn't mean to scare you, your daughter is ok it's just that she is a very special girl." I stood there waiting for her finish her thought. "When your daughter came into the operating room she looked at us and said, what do you want me to do. The doctor couldn't believe what he was hearing. He said, is this my gunshot victim and your daughter said yes what do you want me to do. He said nothing sweetie. I told her that she would become sleepy in a moment and once the anesthetic was injected she started waving good-bye until she was sleep."

By this time I was crying, the reporter that was eavesdropping was crying and the lady that was telling me this story was crying. She told me that I had a very special little girl. Now you must know that my daughter was five years old at the time she was shot.

I went up to her room and gave her the gentlest hug and I started crying again. This child started rubbing my back and said, "It's going to be ok mom. I'm going to be ok." I looked at her and said, "I know."

My child was out of the hospital and walking in five days. That is the best recovery for anyone shot in his or her abdomen especially for a child. The nurse and the doctors where glad to see her leave and sad at the same time. She touched all of there hearts.

That was the last day that I worried about my daughter. I remember each and everyday that she has the spirit of an old woman in her and if you talk to her you would believe this to be true. I know that conversation I had with that woman was real and true.

My daughter is still inspiring all that she comes in contact with. She's now ten years old going on sixty-five. The most recent advice she gave was to my son. He was being superstitious about something and my daughter said, "Jeremy there is know such thing as bad luck." My son said, "There was." My daughter gave him this look and said, "Not if you believe in God." He looked at her and knew she was right and gave the typical big brother answer "Shut up talking to me Moonie." I just sat back and said to myself damn. That's some of the things you can expect coming from my old lady's mouth. She's a little girl with old lady wisdom.

When and Why

By Maria Kishchenko

We yielded to temptation
A John Waterhouse inspiration
What I was chasing after
The ocean hereafter
Protect me, isolate me
Do what you will
But leave my head empty
Oh him until, until...

Still no one to guide me
To stay with me, hide me
Only rules to divide me

Not gently, nor kindly
Constrict me and bind me
Just find me, please find me
Tonight or tomorrow
But not before, before...

Perhaps an illusion
Maybe my heart
An endless intrusion
Yet we're miles apart
Always confusion
Decisions, division

An intricate web of a life
What a way to envision this, this...

I see now, at last
You have lost your way
We shall rule the world
We will rue the day
Know that I will not go
Don't say that cannot stay
No, I'll find a new life
Today...yes, today

A Mountain To Climb

By Robert Richley

While my child was being born
I arose early in the morn'
And rushed to be on my way.
I didn't even pause to pray.

A mountain laid before me.
I had to climb it. It just had to be.
A friend asked to come along,
But I refused for I was strong.

My wife waved good bye in tears.
Said she hadn't seen me in years.

But the mountain held me in fear
And I couldn't see nor could I hear.

Climbing the mountain was such a
rush.
I didn't notice thistles and thorns in the
brush.
A few scratches didn't seem to matter
to me.
I couldn't feel how it was poisoning
me.

I reached the mountain peak all alone
And the emptiness chilled me to the
bone.
My wife and all my children cried.
My friends looked away and sighed.

I had achieved wealth and success,
But my life had been a pitiful mess.
It was all nothing but a pile of dung,
Because of the relationships I had
shunned.

Bump On The Head

By Tim Lotesto

He starts a band. Calls it Bump on the Head
because he likes the way that sounds, and there's
a guy at school who said the name was the
bomb when he told the guy. On the stairs as the
voices echoed like they
do off all that linoleum.

Bump on the Head is crazy feedback like it's
1991 and the Brits are buying guitar pedals and
pressing them at random and one time Derek
who plays bass makes his own nose bleed the
vibration is so jarring.

Keeps playing though and the singer keeps
singing swatting the hair
dripping stinging his eyes. And this just practice in
a bedroom not
something real.

The drums hit your chest like someone is
inside trying to pound
the hard way out on the flat plate of your sternum
and the cymbals
headaches that shimmer out so quick.

Bump on the Head breaks up on a day that's

so cold their
fingertips itch. Outside the house where they
practiced until today.
Breath fogging in clouds hiding their faces making
it easier to say they
want out. Four different reasons fogging the air
and when they listen to
the radio now they don't even think about it at all
not really.

The Eternal War Is Still Here

By Lee Kitzis

(For Allen Ginsberg)

I

Blown down by
whistles bombs
a million Jehovas
wailed down in
the streets

crooked Chicago
cops making a
sandwich human
meat behind bars
waving imaginary
phone calls

while the celebrities
sit on their hands
and the yack and
terror of talking
heads the military
hijacking the airwaves
naked documentists
weeping in the pressroom

The perpetuation
of the dead hours
and the dead days
the violent schmuck
of reality faking
boom of orgasms
70% for war 20%

against while 50%
crowd the streets
running in terror
bruised by robotic
cops billy club
shocks and rubber
bullets

I nominate a black Taoist president!

II

I read an article
by M. Donohue

said profanity dumbs
down writing pointed
to Dickens and Melville
and Shakespeare

Left out Miller and
Ginsberg and Burroughs

We are not pirouetting
on our toes anymore

The romantics are dead

We live in profane times

Time of electroshock and
atom bomb begets time of
Vietnam and death lottery

begets time of Chechnya/
Russia Iran-Contra begets
time of fear factory CNN
militia citizens armed to
the teeth preventing the
apocalypse of imaginary
phantoms VX screams
Vieques and disillusioned
voters

We live in profane times
M. Donohue

When we stub our toes
We scream

III

Lao Tzu said

Those who see through the
fear will always be safe

he also said

that the world is chaos

and if you bottle it
the glass will explode

sending shards everywhere

20

The Honored

By A.D. Ball

Corrupt they call us damned by doubt.
For they do not know us the honored
are about.

Criminals they call us and murders
too, but we call each other by brother,
friend, and we like to hang in a crew.

Businessmen I tell you; legit all
through, but the feds would rather
label us racketeers in a Mafia stew.

Label me an entrepreneur who took
the risk and made money off this.

Sure we honored as you would like to
call us love to dress, but would we not
be men if we didn't have clothes to
impress.

Turn the perceptions of those put to

rest like Charlie "Lucky" Luciano,
Carlo Gambino, and all the rest.

Let your hound dog Rico sniff and
search us out, but we are not hiding
the honored are about.

Open up your pigeon coops and let
the rats run free, but as soon as I
plead the fifth it has to be devastating
to me.

Politicians are the worse out of the
whole federal crop of course.
They would condemn us honored as
though we had no souls then turn
around and make toxic landfills until it
gat old.

Now tell me who is evil I say?
It is not the honored that does these

things then tries to get away.

We honored are family men by tradi-
tion I say, but the government and
their dog Rico would rather take our
livelihood and put us away.

This thing of theirs I said it be true, but
it is the government who is the 90.
Caliber Pezzonovante amongst you.

The honored shall strive to live as
dose any other man, even though the
Senate, Judicial, and Executive fami-
lies will try to deal us a bad hand.

Cast light unto us Honored and we
shall not run for if we do we will cer-
tainly lose the inevitable qwon.

Don Vincent LaTanglia

Without You

By Maria Kishchenko

It would not have come to this
Had I watched you carefully
Or been less susceptible to boredom

Was I in tune with my senses
And let myself understand
The unfolding events

Could I remember such details
As the color of your eyes
Or maybe remove my senses

So that I would not have to notice
The absence of you standing there
Had I done or said something

But in the end, there is always this:
Had I held on any tighter
I would have been torn apart

Broken Glass

By Maria Kishchenko

She had him to herself
For a moment, she thinks
But today, tomorrow
She has to start all over again

Still trying to fall asleep
And control her dreams
Endlessly picking up pieces
They fall apart at the touch of her fin-
gers

So she tries again
His face breaks up into smaller bits
Distorted
But always there

Making up stories
Maybe he never was
Or might be forever
Or has no place in her heart really

Every day
Week, month
They turn into one another
It confuses her sometimes

Her life, his life
The last time she saw him, oh God
That endless cycle again
Shut up, it didn't mean a thing

Your Presence

By Lisette Santos

2/ WHEN I TOUCH YOUR HANDS
THE TOUCH OF YOUR HANDS
BRING A RUSH THROUGH MY
BODY
YOUR PRESENCE - EVEN THOUGH
IT IS SILENCE,
FILLS ME MORE THAN WHEN YOU

ARE NOT NEAR.
JUST AS LONG AS I KNOW YOU
ARE NEXT TO ME,
IT CALMS MY SPIRIT, MY HEART
MY ENTIRE SELF AS A PERSON
THOUGH I DO NOT KNOW WHAT I
FEEL

I DON'T KNOW QUITE WELL HOW
TO DESCRIBE IT
IT BRINGS AN INNER PEACE
AN INNER PEACE THAT ONLY YOU
GIVE ME

Teenage Groupie

By Jenny Seay

Tracy just knew that she was born to be a groupie.

"It's my destiny," she boasted to her friends. They were sitting in the corner booth at their local McDonalds, sipping milkshakes and picking toasty edges off the buns of their cheeseburgers.

Leela, Tracy's next-door neighbor, sat hip-to-hip with Tracy, gazing at the girl's stiff black hair and spider eyes, wondering if her friend really would get to love the blond-maned, high cheek-boned men they ogled in Hit Parader.

Across the table, Leela's sister Gillan scratched the back of her neck and twirled her red ponytail. "Sebastian Bach is gay. And Axl is married to that model chick."

Tracy snorted. "Doesn't matter if Axl is married. He needs love on the road." She sent a ketchup packet whistling past Gillan's ear. It hit the wall behind her and dropped on the seat.

Gillian flung the packet back at Leela, whose cheeks sucked in as she slurped her shake. "Lee, that's annoying."

Leela ignored her sister, and patted Tracy's elbow. "But I heard he beats her." She bent her head under the table, unzipping her backpack

and pulling out a magazine.

Tracy's nose wrinkled as Leela plopped Masters of Metal between them, flipping the pages with black-tipped fingers. She stopped on a portrait of GNR, pointing excitedly at Axl Rose's knuckles. "See!" Leela exclaimed, "they're red, like he was punchin' somebody."

Tracy eyeballed the photo, tracing her index finger over the left fist of her idol. "He's pissed at everybody. Doesn't mean he hits girls."

Gillian scooped bits of bun into her burger wrapper. The paper crinkled loudly as she bunched it up. "What if he does?"

Tracy snatched the still-open magazine to her chest. Gillian was such a fucking doomsayer. "Not me," Tracy declared. "I wouldn't do anything to make him mad."

Leela bit her lip, hoping Tracy wouldn't wrinkle the paper. But Tracy was too busy brushing the glossy portrait against her heart to notice. Sure, she'd never had a boyfriend before. Sure, the only kiss she'd shared was a spit-lipped peck with Roger Firnstein back in sixth grade. But she was a freshman in high school now. She was ready for real men. And next week, when her

cousin Jeremy got her backstage for the Masters of Metal Jamboree, she could finally satisfy the rumbling she'd been feeling in her loins. No more Miss Goodie Goodie. No more lonely Virgin Queen. Leela and Gillian doubted her now, but she'd show them. When she strutted in with a fistful of Polaroids, all with her straddling the laps of their favorite stars, stars that gave a big fat thumbs-up to the camera, they would know she wasn't shittin'.

They would recognize that Tracy's narrow thighs were destined to hug the hips of every lead singer, bass player, and drummer who'd appeared on the Headbanger's Ball. And when they did, Tracy planned to stick her middle finger right against Gillian's pointy nose and say, "I told you so."

But until then, she'd have to settle for Axl Rose in paper form. She hugged the magazine tighter, continuing to let him nestle his pale face and sweaty bandanna warm and snug against her cleavage. He was welcome to stay there until his red-knuckled rage, the violent temper Leela had tried to warn her about, was flushed clean from his pores.

Aran Featured In Sepia

By Natalie Hill

The background
inflamed blotches-
spilled onto a freshly inked page-
a napkin dispenser
a clock
a fire-code compliant exit sign
a coffee maker with a full pot
Cheese cake pumpkin pie confetti sprinkled angel food

She is in focus foreground sideways glancing
wearing black blond eyebrows skin
One skeletal braid a teeming corn snake reaching
for her clothed breasts that
camber like picked apples
or unripe pomegranates dropped in a sheer plastic bag

The Music of the Loop

By Lee Kitzis

The city
moving like
a granite
and steel
bloodstream

the roads
and sidewalks
veins people
pumping
moving to
a fleshy
beat

There's a
hidden rhythm
here

A little
sceaaa of
glass

the hard
moan of
brick

the foot
stompin'
always movin'

a million
whispers and
an automobile
boom

the birds
conduct

and the
train takes
a solo

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