

*The
Alembic*



Spring 1992

THE ALEMBIC

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The Alembic represents the distillation of talent from Providence College students and area authors.

ON THE COVER: Jim Evangeliou's artwork, untitled.

ON THE BACK COVER: Mill Lawlor's artwork, untitled.

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*In Loving Memory of
Renee Fortin
Professor of English
Editor of The Alembic, 1954-1955*

*Streaming Onyx
for Rene Fortin*

My brother, you went down to the grave.
The lily of your breath plucked by the fistless fist.
And I would bend myself inside the black logarithm of streaming
Onyx and cut myself on the blades of gamma rays
To get to you and cover you with my evening
Gowns and jewels, but nothing will buy
You back, not even the song
I sing for you on the harp of my bones.
Dissonant, dizzying, the sting of
My salt scraping your cracked violin.

For when I last saw you, Rene, the black rosary twined around
Your jutting wrist bone, your body a broken target
Hit by lightening, your eyes opened and flamed
Blue, a tumult of water and sky. Light
The earth goes begging for came
From them. You were all I know
Of Jesus. Holding your hand
I saw the "rays that are
Sown for the righteous" mounting in
Waves over you, and then you shot through space.
A black hole subsumed you. You moaned, as I crooned my blind love.

Always your gaze is on me like the taste of honey to
The starving. Your clear thought breast-strokes inside the cavern
Of my head like instructions against drowning. I can
Not say what happens in the recesses of
The morning glory's annunciation of
Morning, but you have joined it.
On this side of its white silence I can tell you
You keep autographing my cast with your name and moontide
Surges in me home movies of your Chaplinesque-Hamlet-limp-walk, and
Which of us, Rene, will ever recover from the aphrodesiac we called
your mind?

Jane Lunin Perel

POETRY, PHOTOGRAPHY AND FICTION

Brendan Byrnes

Abstracted Cubism

Mondrian never crafted a lily.

He stepped on them on his way to the cafe whose
pool table was a green velvet coffin with breathing
holes for the demons hidden
below the building's foundations.

Mondrian never conceived a haystack.

He smoked hash alone in his boarding house
room imagining his penis one long line that
would invade the personal
space of Paris critics.

Mondrian never touched his mother.

He screwed cheap young whores in the dark of
a fringe tent while sticky children
watched and ate over-ripened tomatoes in
the dust.

Mondrian never considered God.

He swallowed small marbles to sense their
path through his lower
bowels cramping his intestines
until he completed a painting.

Untitled

The tablecloth stiffens
starches w/ the conversa-
tion to the point of cor-
rugation crumpled under
pressure.

Northern Spanish

wine centrally spaced

Spices Slap my Buds,

Still now they seem softened seeking satiation in saturation as the sweet breeze of Old Spanish air floats through the fourteen floors of the city kindly cooling it before the long daze attack of Spain's Special siesta seducing sun.

Faint baby blue above and pink paled lightly off skyward reaching cloud I love to tell of the calm before the dawn, peacefully, a nice warning to the madness to come, one more time: horns, heat, helados...

The moon fights this of course, dutifully, just over half-present. Glowing steadily strong filling more than its allotted space in the sky symbolizing a deep night already past.

The England-shaped cloud has stretched itself out, become brighter, now is Argentina stretching itself arching over my head trying to find the sun on an invisible horizon really before it should. Ambitious, but foolish gesture-physics and all being its floating foundation.

That loving pink is everywhere now as an oil painter might have it no fine lines saying here pink then blue as the dome changes from hue to hue.

Mr. Moon stands his battle all alone now haze on the western horizon humming of early deliveries foretell the certain future. The sweetness is almost all but gone from the air while my man Moon still hangs playing truth or dare. The battle seems lost on this day extended by six- out of the heat I'll fly reaching into the solid blue diving across the well known horizon

In search of,

You.

Milk the Cows

“Let the cows milk themselves!” yelled the farmer to his wife as he slammed the door to the old farmhouse, jumped on his tractor and stormed up the dirt driveway into town. Before the dust had settled outside, he was sitting with a beer before him in the town pub. The bartender had seen the farmer coming and poured an extra large thirst quenching beer for him. His butt wrapped around the bar stool and his broad shoulders took up the space of two men. Everyone stayed clear as he stared at the rising bubbles in his beer.

“Damn cows! Milk ‘em in the morning, milk ‘em in the evening. Clean up the shit, feed ‘em more hay. I hate cows. I should have been a racecar driver like I always wanted to.”

“Ready for the race?” asked the bartender.

“Damn right I am! Ain’t nobody gonna beat my ass in this race. I got a V8 shoved in my tractor now. I got her some new heavy duty tires, extra shocks, overdrive, and with my kick-ass moonshine she is gonna plow across that cow field like a bat outta hell!”

He wiped his sweaty forehead with the cow-smelling flannel shirt and stared into his beer as the rising bubbles seemed to mesmerize him.

“Those damn cows are driving me insane. All they do is eat, shit and then you gotta milk ‘em till they run dry. I should have burnt the farm down when I was a kid. Why did Pa have to dump the farm on me anyways?”

“You’re the only son, ain’t ya?” confirmed the bartender.

For the first time the farmer’s eyes strayed from those fizzing bubbles in his beer and peered into the eyes of the bartender. The pub became so quiet that a drop of sweat rolling off the farmer’s nose could be heard splashing into his beer.

“That’s right. Ain’t nobody gonna beat my ass in this race...She is gonna fly across that cow field like a bat outta hell.”

His dirty hand gripped the beer mug and in one single motion he drank that extra large thirst quenching beer. A burp to be proud of echoed throughout the pub.

“I’m gonna win that race for sure!” he yelled before he slammed the door to the old pub, jumped on his tractor and stormed down the dirt driveway to the farm.

He pulled his double barrel shotgun out from behind the seat and with a pocket full of shells, he headed for the cow barn. After pumping two rounds

into each cow, he threw a match into the moonshine soaked hay. He stared into the rising flames which seemed to mesmerize him. Then he jumped onto his heavy duty tractor and with his butt overlapping the seat, he flew across the cow field like a bat out of hell.

Richard Wilmarth

missing the spotlight

with her
i learned
a new way
to dance

slower
more fluid like
flowing

but now
she's gone

the music's
turned down

and the clubs
have closed
forever

Dieter Weslowski

For the Re-Membered Buddha

Buddha serene,
serene Buddha,
I'm working
on your lotus
position, but
get fixated on your ears
that seem too big
for the rest
of your portly serenity.
In short,
my eyes wander,
amazed
at your wholeness,
considering
how your limbs were once
sawed off & stored
in a barn until the War
was over.

Easter Sunday

The sun coming in through the picture window is Christ ecumenical. I am ten and I know this. Then my mother says get dressed for church, and my father, who won't go to church, says he'll go get my grandmother. He's Protestant. I watch him protest, testing everyone because he's a teacher, lecturing us because he's a teacher. I am going to be a teacher too. Even then, when I knew Easter Sunday was imitation: a festival of resurrection held on the first Sunday after the full moon, a day of food and finding jellybeans hidden, a day of stock up vodka just in case, I did what I did just like him. After dinner at Aunt Lil's, he drives us home, and when he swerves and laughs, and my mother frowns, but then laughs because she's had a glass of wine, we laugh too. I laugh at the small plastic Virgin Mary on the dashboard, see her standing stiff and sad after seeing her son's hands and feet nailed into wood, the windshield the world--Pawtucket's houses and buildings going by--the sky of that world I'm told existed, that world, that man I'm told I can only be saved by if I believe that he existed as the son of the Father. This son of the father in the front seat smells martinis exhaled, eats chocolate eggs till he feels sick, sleeps like he wishes he never existed.

Teresa Martineau

Stone Angel

He told me his dream of a landscape all smoke and stone. There were no trees, only moss spreading like wings on rain washed stones. Water, the color of red sandstone, pooled in the hollows among the rocks. He knew that he had been in this land always, that in the beginning he had seen it covered with forest so tall that it drank up the light in the sky. Now there was no forest. There were sea, rocks, and a curve of bare sand left to birds alone.

He walked where horn-shaped stones jutted out into little steps and shelves and the steps rose higher until they made rickety cliffs to shelter the sea. He could see a few small hills, baked in black ash from a long dead volcano.

In the dream he heard the noise of disturbed water and he turned to see a black lamb drinking from a freshwater pool. The lamb disappeared into a cave. He sat down on a rock and rested his head on his knees. The rock lapped around him in a pattern of wings that seemed to lift the land like a stone angel. He had been born to this land centuries ago and knew that it was Scotland. Then the rain slanted down, a black cloud covered over him, and the land disappeared, and Hart woke up in our bed.

Hart shook me awake to immediately decipher his dream with my reference manual "Dr. Harmon's Dream Book of the Orient and the Occident". Dream books can be complex and difficult to use, but Dr. Harmon lists all dreams in alphabetical order.

I walked naked to the bookcase, squinting through the glass for Dr. Harmon's soft green leather. The floor was cold, and my body was chilled but I did not bother to dress in my rose chenille robe.

I looked up Scotland which should come between To Dream of Scabs (which is to dream of money) and To dream of Scissors (which is to dream of quarrels). But there was nothing. I looked up to Dream of a Foreign Country, Abroad, Europe. I was desperate enough to look up To Dream of Travel. I read-To Dream of Travel is to dream of obstacles or good fortune- Hart insisted that he hadn't traveled to Scotland, that he had always been here and was not to leave. He was irritated and asked me to put the book away. I slept again. That

is how I remember all of this beginning.

When I was seven I used to look at the stars in the sky and see the sky as one big piece of pretty cloth like my Aunt Maria's velvet and the stars were silvery glitter-headed stick pins. One star was jabbed into the sky right next to another. I didn't know that the sky had other dimensions. I didn't know that when I saw the flash of a star in the sky, I was seeing a flash that had occurred thousands of light years past. Or that one star could have eons and eons of stars stacking behind, an endless underlying of stars. Now I see all the days before Hart's obsession with Scotland stacked away little stars, polar distances apart.

It has only been one month since Jesus had the party, but it seems longer. Jesus filled aquariums with pretty goldfish and sea shells and plastic dinosaurs and then added vodka and ice. All the fish started swimming drunk and banging their little heads into the ice cubes. Later the fish floated to the surface and were still. We sipped up vodka through pink-striped straws.

I was wearing a dress that was designed for me by my friend Miss Molly. When I first wore the dress, and looked at myself in a long oak mirror, I saw the luminous reflection of my own aura. The dress makes me holy. It has grommets and hooks made of rusted iron pipe Miss Molly found at an auto salvage dump. The beauty of the dress is that there are cut-outs at my breasts. I have small breasts but still they look very nice sticking out of the two velvet-rimmed holes. The dress is black velvet and it falls to the floor. Before the party I asked Hart to hook up all the grommets in the back, which took 15 minutes. I remember that Hart, too, was beautiful for the party. We tied little brass bells and chains in his long hair, and he dressed all in faded brown leather. I remember how his too loose mouth remained hooked on his cigarette the whole evening, and how the shades fell on his too fleshy face, pale except for his eyes lined in black.

Everyone wanted to look at my breasts at the party. One sweet guy with a shaved head rubbed ice cubes all over my nipples, I suppose that was nice. Then Jesus licked one of my breasts. I didn't like it but felt I had to be pleasant as Jesus was the host of the party. Jesus could stick his tongue out very far and then flip it so it twirled like a skinny bird. Jesus disturbed me, with his black bottle eyeglasses and his thick pink gums. His gums have a sly way of hiding inside his mouth like an extra set of secret and more malicious lips.

The party and Jesus and even Jesus' mouth are now only sleepers in my memory. My memory has to sleep to protect me from Hart's complete alteration of himself.

A few days ago I was forced to attend a bagpipe concert in the gymnasium at Renato Dulbecco High School. The school janitor sweeping up the hallways

told me that Renato Dulbecco was an American virologist born at the turn of the century. I was saddened to see that this high school memorializing Renato was slowly eroding. Exposed pipes dripped black and green liquids on cracked linoleum floors. A few windows were broken and patched up with cardboard. We sat on splintery gymnasium bleachers and were among seventeen people who paid three dollars to hear bagpipes. Early in the concert I was almost sweetly transformed by the wild and lonely sound of the bagpipes, but I was not transformed for too long a time. I began to doubt that the bagpipers were professionals, or that they were even Scottish. I wondered if Scotland still existed as a state. It might be that Scotland is one of those countries that became extinct after a war and is now part of some rocky shore in the Netherlands or Germany. I was only minimally interested. Until his dream of Scotland, Hart was curious only of countries that manufactured and exported illegal drugs, and now all that has changed. He does not use his name "Hart Burns" anymore but has reverted to his birth name "John Burns" to fully express his Scottish heritage. Hart took at least ten polaroids of the bagpipers while I seemed to fall asleep, only my eyes were fully open.

Yesterday I came home at twilight and Hart was sitting at the kitchen table in the dusky half light. He wore a T-shirt that had been silk screened with the map of Scotland, including the islands.

The map had two dots for cities, one for Glasgow and one for Edinburgh. He also wore a baseball cap with 'Scotland' printed in red on the cap's bill. The contents of a dirty, frayed canvas bag were scattered across the table. All of the papers were brochures and tourist literature on Scottish landscape. I noticed that one brochure devoted itself to what one might expect from Scottish weather conditions. Hart was unaware of the darkening light in the kitchen, it was almost too dark to read. I switched on the electric light and Hart blinked twice at me, looking harmless but still obsessed.

My last ex-boyfriend introduced me to Hart. We were at a bar and Hart was playing in the band. Hart excited me immediately and with the music as a stimulant, it was impossible to deny my sexual arousal. All the time I watched Hart perform, with my legs straddled and my body tipped forward on my chair, the music was moving through him to me in humming vibrations. Then the vibrations would gather themselves into one dense vibration and completely penetrate me. I imagined all this when he was leaning back, when he hunched forward, when he shut his eyes, when he stretched his neck back and back and all the vibrations were inside me. I did not know the exact place where the throbbing of the chair on the floor stopped and the throbbing of me started. His teeth were very white, I noticed.

My hair hung flat and white down my back and when his fingers went to the guitar strings it was as if the strings were attached to the bleached strands of my hair. He was almost catching the tips of my long hair. It was a dark room,

and cool. There was a door open near where the beer and ice were stored, and a hazy coolness misted into the room. When the band took a break, my then-boyfriend Kid said, "Let's go to Hart," and we went over.

Kid was the first person I seduced on the east coast. I was first attracted to his bulging left eye, which is much larger than the other. Later he told me that the disfigurement was the result of brutal childhood beating administered by his father, who left soon afterwards and did not return. I thought Kid was sweet and quiet but that is only how his still passivity appeared on our early acquaintance. He is one of those T.V. kids, and that is how he came to be called The Kid, and later just Kid. I mean that all he liked to do is stay home, drink beer and watch television re-runs. I moved in with Kid for a few weeks, although there was little space for me in the apartment. His apartment was a television graveyard where ancient and useless T.V.s buried themselves over. Kid would occasionally try to resurrect them all with cable. There were metal tins of color tubes and spools of wire and cord and spent walnut and mahogany cabinets, their innard tubes lost, screens long smashed. Kid stored television channel knobs in drawers like precious, antique buttons. Kid had five working televisions, two with exceptional reception. Sometimes he would turn them all on at once and blue-green-red lights from the changing images would flicker throughout the room.

We watched many Patty Duke and Brady Bunch re-runs sitting up late in bed. Kid loved the Patridge Family too but they only re-run those in Tokyo. The unfairness and indifference of T.V. programming upset him and he wrote letters to all the networks and when they didn't respond he wrote to the President of the United States and to the Japanese embassy. One year he took a trip to Mexico because a friend told him he could find the Partridges on T.V. in Mexico City. Only his friend was wrong, they didn't show it in Mexico City. I think they used to show it in Brazil.

Kid would always cry a little at the end of the re-runs, especially Brady Bunch re-runs. He said the old shows reminded him of his dream of belonging to a nice and normal family. I told him that every family is creepy, and the more normal they seem, the creepier they are. That is my one certain belief. Kid had many regrets about his family but I didn't think they were so bad. His mother was some kind of addict and his father travelled incognito, continually changing his address. I have known of families much more sordidly vacant. When I moved out of Kid's apartment, I was told he went on a serious T.V. binge, staring at the set for days.

It always surprises me that Kid knew so many people in the city when he was usually alone with his T.V.. He called Hart the Most Divine Madman, and spoke of Hart often to me before I ever saw his band at the club. I once thought it was fate that brought me out East and into Kid's bed who then introduced

me to Hart. I don't know about fate anymore. I don't know if fate actually meant to bury me in Hart's unslacking devotion to Scotland. For some days now I have regretted believing Hart to be my one true love before he turned Scottish. I have even regretted coming East at all with my first ex-boyfriend.

Before he dreamed of Scotland, Hart and I liked to drink tequila from the bottle until dawn and then we would have sex at sunrise. Hart would never come but we were both happy. We would become hungry and go out for breakfast. Hart could drink down his coffee all at once like he was slamming shots of tequila, even when the coffee was steaming hot.

At breakfast Hart would eat his eggs first and then I sat in his lap and had my eggs spoon-fed.

Hart liked my hair flat and white and bleached to the color of bone and sometimes in the afternoon he braided it in a smooth plait all the way down my back. Sometimes in the afternoon we would have to take naps because we were tired and sick from the tequila.

We were often drunk. Hart once invited me to a picnic and he only brought beer. I became very drunk at Hart's picnic and took off most of my clothes. Hart chased me until I cut my foot on a stone. After that Hart told me to dress.

We walked along on a stony beach, bright and sharp with chips of glass and the quills of decaying feathers. We circled around a clump of dead birds, with living birds pecking at the dead birds and other living birds. All the birds were fighting and pecking until some flew off to eat fish. The dead fish were already mostly pecked dry. Then we climbed over some rolling, rusted pipes to a cliff and sat in the sun. Our faces were greasy. Hart opened another beer against a sharp point where two rocks met. Beyond the rocks was a clear field and a few ragged clumps of trees. This was the picnic ground, and soon we left the rocks to lie in one patch of grass.

Hart began to kiss me but I asked him to stop. All during our picnic I had wondered over a curious question. I wanted to know if squirrels could scream. I asked because one day before the sun went down I was sitting alone on Hart's balcony and heard strange screaming. I couldn't see any people, only empty clothes a woman had been hanging in the balcony across. But that woman had gone inside. Squirrels moved frantically from tree branches to rooftops to trees, shaking it all down, leaves and loose dirt streaming in a rain. I could hear that screaming, and the pads of squirrel feet smacking and their hard claws scratching on roof tiles. I did not know if squirrels could scream. I am not very acquainted with most animals. Once I used to wonder if giraffes throw up. They have such long necks. Is there such a force inside that could propel

vomit all the way up that skinny tunnel? Only recently did I learn on Kid's T.V. that giraffes are cud chewers who swallow the cud with strong throat and neck muscles.

There were half a dozen squirrels sadly looking for food in the bare field. Hart took a can of beer and shook it until it foamed, then he held it out low and made kissing sounds with his lips. One hungry squirrel with white eyes was easily coaxed to lick at the foam and stood before Hart with its paws poised like it was praying, its head turned to the side. Hart snatched at the squirrel and wrung its neck. We listened for a scream. The squirrel was dead in under two minutes. The beer can had rolled away from us and was emptying on the ground. The squirrel twisted up for a moment then the little legs hung down. It didn't make a sound. Hart dropped the squirrel underneath the low hanging branches of a black tree. Hart stood with his legs spread, the squirrel on the ground, the overhanging branches black in the sky.

One morning we were drinking hot coffee in thick mugs and the windows in the apartment were steamed over. Hart would only speak of Scotland. He told me how Scotland was all one big forest until sheep were introduced and they ate all the forest away. Hart was actually wearing a kilt and athletic knee socks, something which I was carefully ignoring. I also ignored all that he was saying-Sweetie maybe you'd understand this more if you would take a little interest in your own heritage- he says very slowly, the way people talk to children, deaf mutes, and the mentally unstable. I was silent and did not tell Hart that I thanked all my lucky stars in the sky and beyond that I did not communicate much with my family and have little knowledge of my bloodline.

Even before Hart dreamed of Scotland and formally entered into his obsession, there were signs of its future domination. One evening especially haunts me. I had eaten a few imported figs and was preparing for bed. Hart said he would stay awake a while longer. This was 10 o'clock. At 2 in the morning Hart awakened me by clutching my upper arm. "I just watched an old news clip", he said, "and it was raining so hard in Scotland that the rain fell sideways." I pulled the blankets closer to my face. "The rain was completely horizontal to the ground," he said. I returned to my sleep, but Hart stayed up most of the night, in the chilled house, thinking of Scotland.

A week later he had the dream that he was Modern Man walking in ancient Scotland and he was fulfilled so completely, he dared to call it rapture. Hart is usually not at home, but at the Foreign Cultures Library on Muscicant Street. He goes to the reading room, with its long, narrow windows and rotting leather chairs. He reads all he can of Scotland in the library's sweet gloom and muteness. Sometimes he brings the books home, and when he is asleep, I leave

the bed quietly so as not to wake him and look at his books in the kitchen, by the light of one small lamp.

I was melancholy when describing Hart's new Scottish vision to Miss Molly. We had met for lunch at a Japanese restaurant. Miss Molly is my closest friend and also, somewhat paralleling my experiences by mere chance, Hart's ex-wife. Hart and Miss Molly were married in 1972 on the radio. That was after Hart left the marines and became a punk rocker virtually overnight. They divorced in 1976.

Miss Molly was rapidly eating fish and sea meats out of a wide, black laquered bowl with her plastic chopsticks. She didn't seem at all distressed about the Scotland fantasy. I was depressed and repeatedly dipped and swirled my tempura in a bitter and sour sauce and was not eating. Miss Molly asked me to place the tempura on the side plate if I was not going to eat any and then I sat across from her, blind and dumb. I thought of the many, documented cases of the Vietnamese women who have almost perfect vision but out of a sincere belief in their blindness, cannot see. Once they saw so many horrors, the horrors overwhelmed their vision. They refuse their own sense of sight. "I don't ever want to see Scotland," I said.

Miss Molly listened to me with her sweet smile and watched me with her heavily lidded eyes and I sat fixed as a stone statue. She sipped down the broth from her laquered bowl and said, "Hart was born a minister's son. He's been a marine, a punk rocker, an alcoholic, a urine-drinking performance artist, a bricklayer, and a practicing Quaker, not in that exact order. Now he's going to be Scottish. You should know how he is. He has to continually rediscover himself."

But then he is reinventing himself to a heritage he was born to. And I am living with a man whose dreams I do not or cannot understand.

My legs were cramped from sitting on the low cushion and after Miss Molly borrowed money from me for the bill, I left to take a walk near the river. Both the sun and the moon were visible in the sky. The sun was a pinkish white circle and the moon was a crisp little sliver like a piece of a horn. It was maybe 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

There weren't many people at the riverbank. I walked past one bench with a seated pair of embracing lovers. In the distance I could see a man running and a dog running ahead of him. I walked past all the benches and then walked on to a path that led into high bushes and trees. The path was marked out by a low stone fence. Soon the path disappeared, the stone fence decayed into

a scarcely visible ridge of loose crumble, and I walked more carefully among straddling weeds and slippery, sandy patches.

I found a thick tree trunk to rest against. My hair was straight down my back in a long braid and I loosened it, combing out the strands with my fingers. My hair had the heavy sweetness of dead grass against my face. I took off my shoes and emptied them of the dry scraps of leaves and loose dirt that had collected to me when I left the path from the thick brush. I had an undisturbed view of the river, resting against my tree trunk. The sky was strangely divided in two, one black half with either the approaching night or an approaching rain, the other half a vivid and clear cobalt blue.

I did not mean to then, but I fell asleep, with my head curled up in the curve of a root and my feet warm underneath a pile of rotting leaves. I don't know how long I slept, but when I awakened the black sky had overtaken the blue sky and the forest was dark. Only the river caught lights, from the moon, and the stars, and the city.

I can only describe the rest as a vision.

I knew I was awake. I felt how my body had stiffened in my sleep. The earth had turned cold beneath my bare feet. I crouched to look for my shoes. I didn't see my shoes.

Instead I saw a red moon rising out of a hole in the ground. Once the moon was secure in the sky, it lit up the river and the banks on either side.

Then I saw a rusty red barge floating soundlessly. And I saw that I, myself, was seated on the barge in a large wooden chair. That was me on the chair, that was my long, bone-white hair, those were my hands resting on the chair's wooden planks. But I did not have the sensation of floating. I could feel myself standing barefoot on the bank, on solid earth. The barge was moving soundlessly. I was being pulled along by six silver wolves, three on each river bank. The wolves looked at me and wept, and I understood that they were weeping tears of love. I put out my hand to touch the wolves as they passed. I felt I was on the riverbank, not on the barge. The spectre of me on the barge did not look left or right. Before I could touch the wolves they dissolved into the forms of six men, three on each side. The men pulled the barge with snakeskin ropes.

The men did not seem strange to me, although they were unknown. They each seemed to possess qualities that I knew in other men who came from different times and different places. One of the men seemed to be my father, whom I know only from photographs. The others looked like various lovers of mine. I even thought one of them was Hart.

As the barge pulled close, the men vanished in the air, but their snakeskin ropes remained and floated on the water for a brief moment before the currents dragged them down. It was then my body on the earth was transposed into the body on the barge. The bodies were joined, maybe, or one of them disappeared, and then I felt the planks of the chair at my back and the loose tug of the water delivering the barge upriver. The wind on the river was cool. I was ecstatic and did not understand why or how. There was me, and the barge and the river, and the river was tugging and sucking us along.

The barge moved slowly and easily. I knew then that I did not need wolves and men to pull the barge. I did not need their servitude, or their slavish adorations. The barge went where I wanted to go. I felt my heart full and heavy as a stone, and then I knew, all the love I needed was my own. I decided to float on the barge until dawn. In the morning I would leave Hart to Scotland.

Speaking In Tongues

Wrapped in sheets like starched cellophane
and blankets that remind me
of my father's unshaven face, complete
with musky breath: the same as the residue in his pipe
which sat too long
uncleaned.

The creaking springs and sweat
dripping in my eyes and low moans that wave
through my ears would make me grin
in other circumstances.

But the moans are from all directions,
and they sound like some animals far away
are suffocating,
snared and alone.

And the bed is too hard and too clean,
except for my sweat, and it creaks because I'm rocking
and rocking and trying to sleep, but there in the corner
I can see my neighbor
in the moonlight that's slit by shadows
of crosses
and bars,
and I can see his lips rattle
in that waxy light, but I can't hear him
because I'm rocking.

The moans break into a chorus
of screams, and I can almost hear what they say,
but I'm rocking
and watching my neighbor's teeth
vibrate in a face that's clenched and red
like his fists.

But they come like they always do,
in that clip-clop gait and white linen,
and they smile as they drag away
another neighbor again, and they tell me
not to be concerned.
So I rock to sleep with the smell
of my father's pipe.

Brendan Byrnes

Lymphomaniac

Frosted hair like a poptart
She rolls her cart with a squeak
And a rattle searching for the hidden
Veins to fill her head with test
Results and thirty-three thousand a year.
Tap, tap, tap and the blood
Flows like frothing beer
Squeeze, squeeze the tainted juice
Out of the lemon arm spitting seeds
Through the gap between her teeth
Caused by a toboggoning
Accident at the age of eight.
Rattle, squeak the cart shimmies through the oxygen
Poor air of the ICU
Discarded needles point the way to the
Lab, pulsing in day-glow lime yellow pink like a crayon heart.
She does not notice that every
Day there is a little death in the pillows,
In the eyes, in the beds and in the bleached
Tile slanted inward toward a steel
Drain in the center.
Hair sprayed and eyes greyed from disinfected
Hospital haze she rolls
Her cart for thirty-three years.
This blood woman will drown someday.
And the dead will dance up and down the halls.

An Upstairs Room

It is rare that I am alone. I have only been alone on very few occasions and I must go through great efforts in order to be alone. I lie and wait as long as I can for Mary to fall asleep. Most of the time I cannot keep myself awake when she has fallen to sleep. We do everything together, and by the end of the day we are equally as tired. We share a heart, and most of our internal organs, so anything I might drink or eat will keep her awake with me. We sleep in a double bed, most appropriately, in the downstairs room in our home. Because we are often very weak, it only made sense to place us there, where we do not need to go up and down the stairs for silly things. That would make us weaker and probably annoyed at times.

I've asked Mary on many occasions how she feels about this. She too shares the pressing feeling of isolation that has been a tremendous part of our lives. (I wish she would stop looking as I write, but there is nothing that I can do without her seeing, take a hint Mary). Mother and Father were blessed with four normal children before we came along. At times I would have liked to pull my mother aside and to ask her exactly how she felt about my twin and me. But it was something that I would have wanted to do without Mary being there, and that was impossible.

With rosary beads tightly grasped, Mother would pray by our bedside during periods of sickness. Her voice would rise and fall as she repeated mumbled sounds. I always wondered for whom she prayed. The pentinent tone in her voice caused shivers to go up and down my spine. (Mary has her own spine). She knew what she had done to deserve us.

Regardless of how understanding our parents are about the creature with which they have been forced to live, I know that they have both despised us at some point. Everything that they could have done for us, they did. Everything they could have given us, they have. But no matter what they do for us, we feel the burning isolation that has marked our lives deeply way down in our gut. Their lives would be happier without us, as would the lives of our brothers and sister.

"What do you think they would use this room for, if it weren't for us?" Mary once asked me. Her tone was sullen. She did not look at me.

I had to wait before I answered, because I was unsure of what kind of a response Mary expected from me. "Maybe John would want to sleep down here," I replied cautiously. "You know, to have a room of his own."

"No," Mary said. "I think they would just use it for storage, maybe throw junk in here. That way they wouldn't have to put anything in the basement."

"Yeah," I said. My mood now matched Mary's initial tone.

We did not remain quite for long. It is far too difficult to be silent for a long time when you spend your life physically attached to your best friend. Mary's quick change in tone and topic brought a familiar smile to my face.

Growing up was not as difficult for Siamese twins as one might assume. Our sister snuck us into show and tell in the third grade (at the time we were only four and had not yet entered school), and our brothers made us part of the neighborhood haunted house each Halloween. Other than these basic mockeries, which all children experience in some form or other, we grew up rather normally. I have never had the opportunity to experience life as a single person, so I do not know exactly what I have missed. I can imagine to a certain degree what it might be like, but only to a certain degree.

Mary says she can. Mary has always wanted to be a single person. I have never resented her for that, but I always wished she would not repeat it so frequently to others. It makes me feel like she resents me and the fact that I'm attached to her. (Oh, Mary stop looking at me like that, you know as well as I do you feel this way).

We make light of our condition as do most people who are handicapped. It is easier for us though, we are not alone. Some people, both friends and random passers-by, look repulsed when we laugh, or joke about our condition. They seem offended, and annoyed. Being Siamese is the only life we have ever known, and we have every right to laugh when we please. And we have every right to actually enjoy life, although that bothers people more than anything else.

Lately, we have not exercised these rights a lot. Lately we have been very disappointed at life, and at one another.

We always knew that we were not going to live for a long time. Our internal organs are weak and malformed. Doctors have told us year after year that it is a miracle that we are still alive. This year they were not as optimistic. This year they smiled weakly at us after our check-up. The miracle was ending. Mary and I had known for a long time that we were getting worse, but the obvious pessimism of the doctor concretized our suspicions.

The night after we left the doctor's office we went into our room quietly. Our family did not know how to react. We sat down in our bed, each of us wanting to be alone. From our room we could hear our family watching T.V. in the parlor near the front of the house. They were all unusually quiet, and we heard that too. Once in a while footsteps would near our room, then they would stop and go away. Mother did not come in with her beads to pray. It cut inside us that she did not find the need to pray this night. Mary and I both wanted to talk to one another, but unless we whispered, everyone else in our family could hear us outside the thin walls.

"You awake, Kelly?" Mary asked a few times, reaching her arm over and touching my face.

"Yeah," I answered back, taking her hand in mine. As much as I had wanted to be alone previously, now I felt the comfort of my twin. Now I pitied every single person in the world who was not able to experience life as I had. Now I was glad that it was not often that I was alone. I smiled through the tears that started to fall down my face. I regretted ever using the word isolation to describe my condition.

Hours later the downstairs of the house became quiet. The heavy silence which followed commotion settled in as feet moved up the staircase and left us all alone downstairs. Now we could talk.

"Do you ever wonder what it's like to be one of them?" I asked trying to pretend that I had not been crying.

"You know I do," Mary answered back. She seemed impatient that I had asked her such a thing.

"I don't just mean single, I mean one of our family," I clarified.

Mary waited awhile before she answered. I think she was crying. The room was dark, but I felt inside that she was crying. "I wonder about a lot of things," she said. She turned her head towards mine, a tear fell down her face. There was a hurt in her eyes that I felt too.

"They all seem really happy most of the time," I said. "Mom and Dad are really good to them."

"Yeah," Mary breathed.

I wanted to talk to Mary some more, but something about her stare stopped me from continuing and gave her time to express her next thought. The deliberate pause before her statement was justified, for her words carried immense gravity. "Kelly I want out now," she stated.

I turned my head away from hers. My eyes filled with water more quickly than they had in a while. I knew that Mary could feel our insides twist with the common nausea. "No," I whispered, "you can't want that."

From the moment we left the doctor's office, I had known that Mary would want this. The tiny difference in our personalities was clearer than ever before. Mary did not want to die slowly. Mary wanted to go now. We had long ago promised one another that when the time came that one of us no longer wanted to live, that we would die together. "Kelly," Mary whispered. I wanted to squirm away. I wanted to separate myself from her.

"I'm not ready. I'm not even close to ready yet," I cried. I felt as though she was betraying me. Our promise of long ago did not seem valid anymore. It seemed childish and insane. "Don't you want to fight anymore? Haven't we always fought this thing, together? Mary, we're not even that sick."

"Yes we are," Mary answered truthfully. "We won't live until our birthday."

"I wanted to vote," I said sadly.

"I know you did," Mary said. "I wanted to vote too."

Now I could look back at her. Our faces were so close together. She paused as I thought. I smiled weakly. I could feel our weakness in every movement. "I'm ready to go," Mary said. "I can't suffer. Shit, I can't watch

you suffer. If it was just me, maybe, but I can't watch you suffer. Not anymore, you have suffered too much."

Mary's words did not sound selfish to me. There was no such word in our relationship. The entire concept of selfishness was a mystery to us, a phenomenon of single people that we understood only as one might understand a strange tradition of a foreign culture. In my mind I had been denying the presence of these thoughts in my sister's mind. We had always fought so hard and we had always proven the world wrong. Why was it that she wanted to give up now? Why had the words of the doctor this day made her mind change? I knew that I could have fought to live without her consent, but that was the cause for which we had struggled. That was not the reason we had so vigorously lived and enjoyed life for so many years.

There were things that I could say to convince Mary that she was wrong. There were a lot of things I could have done to make her change her mind. I could have inspired her to fight some more, but there was something inside of me that made me throw out all of the things I could have said, something inside of me that made me nod.

I put my hand to Mary's face. There were so many things I did not need to explain to her. I did not need to ask how she proposed we kill ourselves.

Mary extended her neck and kissed me lightly. "I love you Mary," she said, using her name to refer to me as we often did during intimate conversations.

The chill of our condition was lifted from inside and was replaced with a warmth, the peace that comes when fighting has ceased. There was a readiness to die I could feel when I began to realize how silly our fight for life had been. I could not remember what we had been fighting against all that time. I could not remember what it was about our condition that was so wrong, so rejected, so evil that we waged a war against it.

The room joined in the silence of the rest of the house for a long time. Neither of us could sleep. "Mary," I said, breaking the silence. She grunted softly, telling me that she was awake and listening. "Do you believe in reincarnation?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, assured. "And I believe next time that you'll get an upstairs room."

Dieter Weslowski

Three Slivered Beats of Silver

So goes
the cut
of the moon,
as lovers lop
each other's
fingers off
with kisses.

Patrick Day

Rain

“no promise” you’d said
when i asked you to meet me
at prospect park
the shirt you’d given me on my birthday
felt tight around my shoulders
it tugged at my sweat
like the beggar for the dime
he knows you have.
i didn’t wait on the broken bench
it looked like it might collapse this time
so i stood
and waited
and a crowd gathered to watch a girl
and a bear
frolic before a camera
the two bathed together before the lens
the bear on his back, rolling
the girl stroking his belly
and scratching that place behind his ears
then, the girl stood
and twirled before the camera
in a spasmodic Julie Andrews impersonation
everyone clapped and smiled
except the bear who was muzzled
and led away by a trainer
his impression in the grass where he’d left it
the crowd dispersed and i
was the park’s once again
so i stood
and waited
and the rain wouldn’t fall.

Andrea Parrella

Ice Cube

You lie blackened
beside me and
I chisel under
ash with
words with touch
to reach your diamond
but find ice

its tune
settles
in
me
a shrieked battle
cry
and I am shellshocked by
the impotency of
your fingers

as they rub gut with
the care of a first
time father
fondling his
drowsy infant

and
your paternal
end
is how my winter begins
and shall I be
your own

frozen doll baby?
shall I sing you a lullaby?

Nancy Craven

Our Daily Bread

Dreamless, you rose at five
the slippery moon melting
in your coffee mug, a quick sliver
of hot black liquid beneath your tongue.
Then the hard deft delight
of slipping the skiff from the dock:
the whole world pulling back
on sea the color of steel.

Your mother's voice stopped
rummaging her pain for unwept tears. The loom
of factories recedes with the shore,
ribbons of confederate blue blot the sky,
drink up green, the rising sun.

Here was the short life
of the krill, swarming
past the knife of your boat;
the boil of the pogies
blessing the water with blues.

Here, for a young man
with an inheritance of love
and a pocket of dust; the gift of silence.
The waves worked their sieve,
the rocking hull licks images:
Your father on his hospital bed;
the belt fraying, squeegee swung out--
a scarab of his working hours;
The navy captain's harsh bark as your fist connects
(he will not grant your weekend pass)
with military brass clots your career,
fluttering, brick red, tattered gauze,
your father bleeds and bleeds.
You hold the bullrakes as a sacred grail,

(he falls and falls) and plunge the salty waters
like a fattened seal. He falls.
You rake with all your might.

What is there for a man like you
who works his hours long as a religion?
The cold, arthritic fingers

when your arms can't raise high or long enough
the fractured pre-s-shh, da-da whizz-z-z? The assembly line
makes quick work of battered lust. Your passion
scuttlebutts the CEO's plans to
buy out what he doesn't want or need
long after all the little fish have been spit out
to fuel his greed.

At the Diner

Relax...I haven't slept in two days. Just give me a minute...Umm...Oh yeah, I remember, I was at the diner...the diner. On River Street, you know the silver one with the Indian cook. Yeah, I was there until at least seven, maybe even later. Sure, go ahead, whadaya think I'm gonna leave?

O.K....he's gone. He doesn't know a thing. I'm bluffing like a pro, he doesn't know a thing. I wasn't really at the diner that morning. But I know the cook and he'll back me up. I installed some lights for him last winter. He's a good guy, he likes me. Anyway, I wasn't at the diner like I said I was. I was at my girlfriend's. Well, my ex-girlfriend, really ex-girlfriend now--hah...So I was over there for the last time. You see, I caught her cheating on me with this guy Tommy Jacobs. Tommy works nights at the Mobil station on Grant Street. I used to slip him an extra buck when I got gas there. I'd say, "Take care, chief." I'll take care of him now, when this whole thing cools off. So, as I was saying, I rode over there - real early so she'd still be asleep. Karen didn't know I knew so I could pretend for awhile. You know, enjoy it and stuff. I pushed my bike the last block and around the back of her old man's house so I wouldn't wake anybody up. Karen lived in a room over the garage. It was pretty nice. We used to open all the windows and have really loud sex 'cause Karen liked to embarrass her folks. It was a riot. You could see the neighbors sort of gathering around their fences (we always did it when everybody was out raking their leaves and shit like that). Most of them would try really hard to pretend they didn't hear us, but some of them would stand at their fences with their rakes at their side and horrified looks on their faces. I loved it. Karen would always ask if her parents were at the big window but I couldn't really see that way. I'd always say yes though, 'cause Karen would get into it more. I'd yell out a thing like -- "I CAN SEE GOD!" and "I'M GONNA COME!" and Karen would scream stuff like "HARDER--HARDER!" and "I CAN'T SEE, I CAN'T SEE!" It was a riot...So, where was I? Oh yeah, I parked my bike behind the house and I climbed the steps to the loft real quietly. The door was unlocked as usual. Karen never locked her door 'cause she was afraid she wouldn't be able to get out fast enough if there was a fire. Karen was always talking about fires and people who burned to death and stuff. I thought she was stupid about that. So I walked in the door and Karen was asleep. She looked really good, better than usual for some reason. But I guess it's that

thing--your hair always looks best on the day you go to get it cut. That's kind of how I felt standing there. The sheets had fallen off the bed and Karen was lying on her stomach with her butt sticking up in the air a little. She was wearing this silky green thing that I had never seen before. I definitely didn't give it to her. I saw a picture in my head of Tommy Jacobs pumping gas at the Mobil station on Grant Street with a big, stupid grin on his face. The whore! She was wearing something Tommy gave her. Well, that got me back in the right frame of mind. I took my shoes off and climbed into bed with her. She moaned a few times and then turned over and opened her eyes real slowly to see my fat face right in front of her. She jumped back and it looked like she was gonna yell but she composed herself real quick. "What are you doing here? What do you want?" she said kind of scared.

"Relax. What are you so jumpy for? It's just me. I wanted to see you," I said without letting on that I was up to anything.

"Oh..." she said. I could tell that she was thinking. Karen's eyes always get real big and her eyebrows go up when she's thinking. I was enjoying this.

"Wanna play The Dead Body?" I asked. That was another really good game we used to always play, but I won't get into that now. I didn't really want to play, I just wanted to see how she would react.

"I'm not in the mood right now. I'm too tired. What are you doing here so early?" she said. She seemed to be relaxing and I could tell that she was pissed that I woke her up. I didn't want to do anything just yet though.

"Oh, I was just out getting some gas, at the Mobil station, you know," I said. She wasn't catching on yet. "You know, the one on Grant Street, where Tommy Jacobs works." Her eyes got really big when I said Tommy's name. She looked at me and she must have known I knew because she made a run for the door. I grabbed her really quick though and put my hand over her mouth. I wasn't pretending anymore. Karen tried to scream as usual but I'm much stronger than she is so nobody heard her--not the neighbors, not her parents. I had planned on kind of dragging it out before I actually did it but I still loved Karen so I made it quick. She probably didn't feel anything. Her neck snapped like a little branch stick and she made a squeaking noise. I laid her body back in the bed, put my shoes back on, and then wiped everything I touched before I left real quietly. I pushed my bike a few blocks before I started it so no one would hear me. So anyway, now all I've got to do is--

Hey, that was quick. Did everything come out all right? Hah...No, I'm fine. Go right ahead, I've got nothing to hide. Yup, The Silver Tail Diner, that's it. I was there until at least seven, maybe later. You can call the cook. He knows I was there. Freddy...Freddy I think he is. Call him.

Ray Jordan

Lateral Lines

Fish float to the surface or sink
to the bottom when not actively swimming
and you feed on the meatus of inflexible
dreams, set fire to the fortress
you pretend to seduce

Water I thought potable
has the faint bitter taste of almonds,
leaves me breathing
but coughing up blood





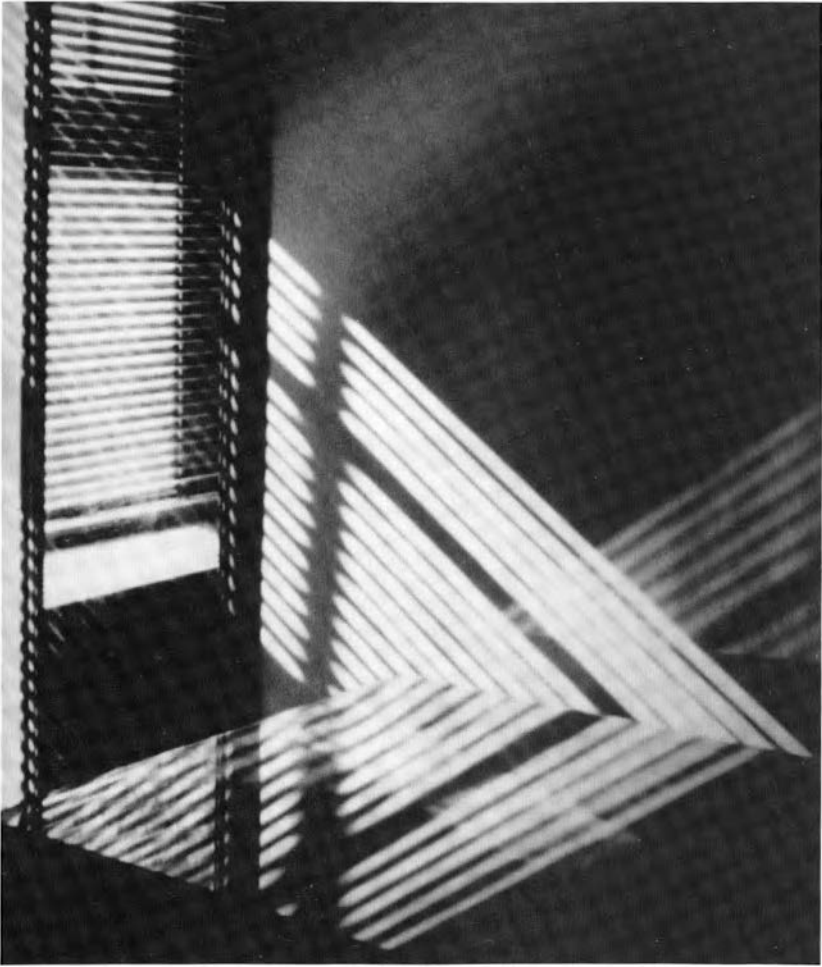












Grainstacks

I was sitting on the grass in the corner of the park eating my lunch when I first noticed him. He was kind of hard not to notice, but quite a few people managed to ignore him. He was crouched behind a flock of pigeons that were pecking at bread crumbs. He held one hand near his face, squinting into the imaginary scope of the imaginary rifle he was holding. He stomped his foot and yelled "Bang!" simultaneously simulating the kick-back of the rifle with his upper body. The pigeons make whatever noise it is pigeons make and flew away. He waited for them to land again and repeated the whole hunt. After firing off a few more rounds, he sat down on the grass about twenty feet in front of me.

I read the newspaper for a few minutes, sipping my Coke when I saw him look up and yell.

"Hey!"

I kept reading. I wasn't sure if he was talking to me. I hoped he wasn't. I wasn't in the mood to go hunting and besides, pigeons were out of season. I thought "Please don't be talking to me...Please don't be talking to me..."

"Hey!"

He was talking to me. I looked up and he was looking right at me. I looked back at him for a second, and realized there was no way out.

"Yeah?" I responded intelligently.

"You from Southie?" he asked. Southie is an Irish neighborhood with about ten-thousand guys who look pretty much the same as me.

"No," I shook my head.

"You sure?"

"Pretty sure," I said, wondering if he was going to ask to see my license.

"Oh. You look a lot like Mickey's nephew. So you're not from Southie," he repeated, like he was used to being lied to. He stood up, gathered his stuff, and walked toward me. I was thrilled.

I kind of smiled when he did this, though. A couple of days before another homeless guy started talking to me when I was waiting for a bus. This lady who worked in the same building as me saw us and came up to me after the guy had left. This lady wore so much makeup she could have been a guy for all I knew. She said "What is it about you? The last two days these people come up to you for no reason, and you talk with them." I said, "What do you mean 'these people'?" "Goddamn derelicts. Why do you bother?" I felt like

telling her to go to Hell and to take her vats of make-up with her, but I just muttered, "I dunno," and got on the bus.

He sat down next to me, wiping the sweat from his forehead and scratching the week's worth of stubble he had on his face. I'm the first to say that a little body odor never killed anyone, but this guy was just ripe.

"So, where are you from if you're not from Southie?" he asked. I told him.

"Oh, yeah. My brother lived out near there. My name's Jerry," he said, extending his hand.

I shook it and introduced myself. I noticed him looking at my sandwich in my left hand. I could tell he didn't want me to notice. It was that kind of look, like when you're interested in a certain someone and you see this person across the room or somewhere. You can't help but look and hope you're not noticed. If you know what I mean, it was that kind of look he gave my sandwich, but I noticed.

"Here, do you want half of this?" I asked.

"No, I couldn't."

"Really, take it. I had a big breakfast."

"Thank you. Thanks a lot."

"You're welcome."

He ate it in about two seconds. He noticed that I had been reading the sports section.

"So, you a Sox fan?"

"Yeah," I admitted. "I hope they win it some time during my life."

"Me too, kid. I've been around probably twenty years longer than you, and I haven't seen them win it. God, it has been years since I went to a game. I used to go all the time. I still remember the first time seeing the grass, the Green Monster..."

His voice trailed off. I looked into his eyes and could see him drifting. I wondered where he was drifting to. A few pigeons buzzed over our heads, and he snapped back.

"I really hate those pigeons," he said.

"I noticed."

"Oh, did you?" he laughed, his blue eyes almost reflecting the bright summer sun. "Yeah, I guess I do make a bit of a spectacle of myself once in a while."

"I didn't really mind, to tell you the truth. I've even thought of doing it a few times myself. You did turn a few heads, though."

"It's probably about the only way most people would bother to look at me. I'm easy to ignore."

I had no idea what to say. I hate times like that. I want to say something, but I'm totally stuck. He was so right, though. I wondered how many times he'd been ignored. He was right, but I couldn't say "Yeah, you're right" without sounding like an ass. He was kind enough to break the silence.

He wiped his forehead again. "How can one guy sweat this much and not just tip over and die?" he joked. "I hate having to carry these clothes around

with me. It's a pain."

"Why do you?" I asked.

"Well, this is a good jacket and I'll need it in the fall. Why give up something you can use later?"

Made sense to me.

"Oh, look," he said. "See that little girl?"

"Yeah, her. God, she looks just like my daughter, but not as pretty. We used to dress her up like that on Sundays and go to church. She was beautiful." He bit down hard on his lower lip and sighed. "You like kids?" he asked.

"Yeah, I do. I think I get along better with kids than with adults. I don't know why, really. Maybe it's just because you can be yourself with them and not worry about anything and they're the same way. They can see right through you if you're fake with them, don't you think?"

"Uh-huh. Kids are about a million times more real than adults. One time last year this little kid walked out of a McDonald's I was sitting outside of and offered me a french fry. I said 'no thanks' when the kid's dad bolts out of the place, grabs the kid's shoulder and says to me, 'Stay away from my son, you goddamn bum!' I didn't say anything. It wouldn't have done any good. I feel bad for that kid, though.

"Ever since then, I've hated French-fries. I don't know if they're really French or not, but they used to be one of the few good things even associated with France. You ever been there?"

"Nope."

"I have. I hated that place. The only good things even connected with France are dressing, toast, onion dip and the Impressionists. Do you know anything about the Impressionists?"

"A little," I said, clearing my throat. Very little, I thought to myself.

"How about Monet?"

"Yeah."

"Man, that guy could paint a mean grainstack. I saw a bunch of those in Chicago. He just painted different views of these stacks of grain in his backyard or something. One at night, one in the day, one with snow. All the paintings are the same, but not really. I'm glad I saw those paintings when I was young. I tried to figure out what Monet's point was, but..."

He trailed off. I couldn't say too much because I wasn't sure what Monet's point was, either. I wasn't sure what Jerry's point was, never mind Monet. He ran his hand through his hair. I noticed he was looking at that little girl again, who was giggling as her father tickled her.

Jerry looked back at me. "Everyone's a little different, I guess. Just a tiny bit."

I nodded. I wanted to ask him what he meant and about his daughter and brother and baseball, but I couldn't. It's not like I really knew him or anything. The bell on the church behind us rang. I had to get back to work.

"I gotta go, Jerry."

"Back to work?"

“Yeah,” I said, a little embarrassed.

“Alright. I’ll see you later. It was nice meeting you,” he said.

“You too.” It was.

We shook hands and I walked away. It took me about three steps to meet up with the make-up queen. Great.

“Another one?” she said, rolling her eyes.

“Go to Hell,” I said as I walked by her.

I haven’t seen Jerry since, but I see him every day.

RIPtide

“Welcome to Hell, yourself,” he replied.

* * * * *

Luther Graham was my first official patient after graduation. Even though I had learned that not everyone can be saved, I was determined that he would be my first success. I was not about to start my career with a failure, and initially, I believed Luther would pose a challenge I could manage. He was assigned to me because I had much experience working with people who had attempted suicide, and he had miraculously failed at ending his own life. I anticipated a diagnosis of depression. I did not expect the additional complication: he thought his suicide worked. And, beyond that, he thought he was in Hell.

Dead and in Hell!

I approached Luther’s room early that Monday morning, the first on my introductory rounds. I hesitated before I entered; I could see him clearly through the doorway although I was still hidden from his view. Several ropes and pulleys loomed over his bed, while various machines surrounded it. A sheet was lightly draped over Luther’s lumpy, reclined figure, tubes and bandages distorted the human shape. Only his partially-shaven head was fully exposed above his steel, cage-like neck brace. He had a broken neck and a concussion, and there was a possibility that he would face life as a quadriplegic. He could not feel or move anything below his neck, and every other part of him was either cut, swollen, or purplish green. These were the injuries he sustained from his leap off a twelfth-floor fire escape. It was a miracle he survived; he really should have been dead.

I entered the room and smiled.

“Hello, Luther. My name is Mary MacDolin, and I’m the new psychiatrist here. How are you doing today?”

His eyes rolled slowly in my direction, then finally settling upon me with a glare, he gave his raspy, crackling response. “You’ve seen the charts. You tell me.”

“Well... Your recovery is going as well as can be expected. I mean, how is your mood?”

“No shit, doc. Thanks for clearing that right up.”

He breathed a chalky sigh and tried to look out the window. I hoped he would speak again, but after an uncomfortable length of time, I decided to

approach the subject directly.

“Luther, these notes indicate that you think you didn’t survive your fall and are now in Hell. Could you explain that to me?”

He squeezed his eyes shut and muttered, “God, if I knew what I was getting myself into, I never, ever, would have jumped...How long will you personally get to torment me, doc?”

“I’m here to help--”

“Help. Torment. Same things, aren’t they?”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because you’re manipulating someone to do as you will them.”

“Well, I guess you might see it that way. But your situation is this: you hate it here and want to leave, correct? I’m the only one who can ‘help’ you do that.”

“You don’t look like God to me.”

“I didn’t say I was God. I’m a psychiatrist.”

“Oh, so you’re the Devil then. Yeah, I can see that...you *are* punishing me.”

“How?”

“By trying to make me think I can leave. Once you give me that hope, you’re just going to take it away again. Then I’ll still be here, and you’ll think I’m a fool and will never stop playing with my mind.”

“You strike me as being very intelligent. Why would I play with your mind?”

“You said you were a psychiatrist, didn’t you?”

I laughed a little, allowing his comment to pass as a stereotypical joke about my profession.

“Yes. I’m a doctor who helps people change their incorrect or detrimental thoughts, especially when those ideas hinder them from pursuing happiness and functioning in the world. And this is the world, Luther, not Hell. You’ll see...I’ll stop by tomorrow.”

“And the next day, and the next, and the next...for eternity, right?”

“I won’t be here for eternity, and neither will you.”

“Yes, we will, doc,” he said with a beaten smile, “yes, we will.”

Luther was definitely going to be tough. From this little exchange, I knew I would have to be better prepared for our next meeting. I did not mind the extra time and work that I knew would be required. As a self-proclaimed perfectionist, I constantly demanded such sacrifices of my free time, especially if they meant an earlier success. (This quality could have risen from my childhood insecurities; I may have felt I needed success to verify my worth.) Therefore, from the moment we met, my thoughts revolved around Luther without my ever questioning their dominating presence. His last words were the only ones which disturbed me. He made it sound as though I were damned forever, too--just like him. I was part of his experience in Hell, yes, but I sensed that he pictured me suffering by myself, in my own personal way, outside of his presence. I did not simply vanish into complete non-existence at the

conclusion of our meeting.

In the beginning, our sessions did not cover much useful ground. But if nothing else, I learned how he argued, and that he wanted proof for everything. Proving that there is life and that we do exist is a difficult, if not impossible task. What is real? Is everything a dream? Whose dream is it? Philosophers through the ages have been grappling with such a puzzle, and now I was directly confronted with it, too. The best approach would be to prove that Luther was "not dead" rather than "alive."

"So tell me," I began after I greeted him in one session, "why do you think you're in Hell?"

A sigh, a piercing stare, then closed eyes to shut me out.

"I'll go away a lot sooner if you'd just co-operate and answer my questions."

"Oh good. Something to look forward to. Alright. I'll play along." He then continued in a whiny, nursery-rhyme voice, "I'm in Hell because I killed myself, and that's a bad, mortal sin, and one God doesn't forgive. So now I'm being punished by experiencing excruciating pain, verbal harrassment, and loss of freedom and privacy."

"Okay--you think you're in Hell because of your physical and mental anguish. Don't you think those are logical after-effects for the trauma you have been through?"

"Maybe, if I lived, but no one jumps from the twelfth floor and lives. It's impossible."

"It's miraculous. Somehow, you did it. Strange things happen, you know. Sometimes people skydive and their parachutes don't open, yet they, on very rare occasions, survive too."

"And I'm supposed to believe I'm a lucky survivor. Look at me. I'm as good as dead and buried--I can't move a damned thing! One of my worst nightmares, remaining conscious after death, seems to have become a reality. My embalmed corpse is six feet in the Earth somewhere and my brain or soul or whatever got left over ended up like this. Makes perfect sense to me, doc. Instead of waiting for my time to go, I rushed it, and now I'm paying for that. If I knew what I was getting myself into, I never would have done it."

"So why did you?"

"Hopelessness--why else? I had had enough. I just wanted it all to stop. I didn't want harps and paradise; I wanted nothing. I mean really nothing, total unconsciousness, just 'blip--' end of Luther Graham, mind, body, and soul. Rest In Peace. I didn't actually believe there'd be an afterlife to deal with, too."

"What are you gaining by convincing yourself you're dead?"

"I'm 'convincing' myself of the truth. I just told you I didn't want this. I wanted total oblivion. If I could shut off my mind, memory, and what few remaining senses I have, I would do it. I hated existence before--that's why I jumped. If you think this is an improvement, you should be the one forced to see a shrink, not me."

"Well, if you were dead, you wouldn't have any responsibilities. No job, no bills, no rent, no social demands..."

"...no freedom, no privacy, no relief from this agony above my neck and no feeling below it, no escape from that penetrating disinfectant stench...I'm pissing through a tube, people are constantly throwing around my legs and arms like I'm some goddamn marionette, and the only time I'm not staring at that wall is when I get flipped over and can stare at the floor! Yeah, I should've killed myself a long time ago. I used to think things were so bad they couldn't get any worse. Now I see I was wrong. I'd rather be out of the fire and back in the frying pan, but I'd really prefer not to 'be' at all...I should've listened to that Sunday School stuff."

"Look, Luther, you're experiencing what anyone else would who had a fall like yours. You have many injuries, but you will heal in time. Your suffering is, unfortunately, part of the normal healing process. But this religious belief in suffering seems very important to you. Why do you insist on calling it punishment? Why do you want to be punished?"

"I don't! But that didn't stop it from happening. I destroyed the life God gave to me, and now He's destroying the afterlife I took from Him. I didn't believe in God until I found myself in Hell, 'cause there can't be a Hell without a Heaven, and there can't be either without a God."

The rest of the session passed with basically the same circular arguments. At the end, I paused before I stood to leave, considering all that he'd said, then concluded by saying, "I'm still not convinced you're dead, or in Hell."

I was out the door when I heard him mumble to himself, "It's not up to me to convince you. You'll do that yourself, on your own."

I walked down the hall not realizing that I was already suppressing the urge to consider believing him.

Our sessions were far too numerous to relate each, verbatim. One time I tried to show him that he could still enjoy certain things, for example smoking, drinking, or eating his favorite foods, when he left. Since he could not afford to rent a television for his room, I arranged to get one, plus a VCR, so I could play his favorite movie for him. Since Hell is supposed to be void of all pleasure, how could it provide something that would make him happy? It turned out that the film he wanted was both foreign and pornographic--totally unobtainable. When I told him that news and asked him to select another, he said that that movie was his first and only choice, so of course he would be denied it. He then declared he would not play "doc's movie game" again.

Another time I held a stethoscope to his heart so he could hear it beating, but he was convinced that the tapping he heard was a mechanical device in the earpieces. He claimed I was tricking him on another occasion, too. That time I lifted his hand in front of his eyes and showed him his long, curving fingernails. My point was that growth is a part of life for every living thing, including Luther. Nonetheless, he still acted as though it were some sort of trick.

I had never met anyone like Luther before, nor had I ever heard of any case like his. I was failing at changing his perception of reality. I had to consider what kind of "life" he would lead if he thought it were his "death." Would it be so terrible if, when he were discharged, he still believed he were in Hell? I had a feeling that it would be terrible for me.

I tested this death-as-life hypothesis during our next session.

"Good morning, Luther..."

"Shit."

"...how are you?"

His wheezing sigh had become a trademark answer for, "I have nothing to say to you." He complained when the pain in his head was worse.

"Oh, good. You're not feeling especially bad today. We're going to try a different approach this morning: for the sake of argument, we'll say that you are dead, and everything around you, including outside, is Hell. Okay?"

"Doc got a dose of reality."

Ignoring him, I continued, "Now, people die everyday and like you, not all go to Heaven. There is not enough room for you to stay here in the hospital, so you will have to be discharged eventually. Does this make sense?"

"Oh, yes, doctor."

"Good. Right now, you're still paralyzed, but your nurse said you felt your right foot for a moment last night. That means there's a chance you'll regain use in your arms and legs, that your paralysis is only temporary. There's a good possibility that you could leave here almost completely physically healed. Hypothetically, what will you do when you enter the rest of Hell?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? You would stand outside the hospital entrance, forever?"

"Yeah, watch and wait for people I recognized, and laugh at those worse off than me."

"I see... You can feel pain, so you have your senses still. If you were better, what would you do if you felt cold or hungry or tired? Would you still stand there?"

"Well, Hell seems to be a lot like Earth so far, so I guess money would still be salvation. I'd steal it, or just take what I wanted to buy."

"If Hell is like Earth, wouldn't you be punished, or put in a prison?"

"Look at me now; I am in a prison. I can't even move. A hangover plus a rabid pitbull in my skull would be a welcomed relief from this agony, and then there are all of you to enhance the experience. What kind of punishment could be worse?"

"If it's Hell, I'm sure they can think up something. What'll you do when you see those people you know? Family? Acquaintances? Ex-girlfriends...?"

"They're here? Well, yeah, they all might be dead by now; time is relative. How long is a day in Hell compared to a day on Earth? Like, if God created the world and man in six days, but evolution took millions of years, six God days must take longer than six Earth days. How does Hell time work?"

"You're missing the point. Seeing all those people you knew would mean

that every one went to Hell. Not one would be in Heaven. Don't you think that's odd?"

"No. They were all terrible people and everyone was rotten to me..." His eyes sparked, and for the first time I heard a genuine laugh.

"Luther? What's so funny?"

"Ha! They'll all be here too! Why didn't I think of that? Oh, I can't wait 'til I see 'em! I'll laugh my head off in their stupid, self-righteous, faces! I have to plan. I have to pay visits to a few people."

"This is all hypothetical. You're not really in Hell."

"This'll be great. I'm screwed for eternity and so are they! I bet I could make their death experience even worse. If I hacked them up into little pieces, I wonder if they'd stay like that? Or what if I doused them with gasoline and burned them? They would probably heal real slowly and painfully, like I am. I'm suffering way too much to let them go on without their full share. Forget what I said about hanging around the hospital; I have places to go now. And, if I do get punished, it'll be worth it knowing I made things that much worse for everyone else. Maybe I'll even get a medal for helping out with your system of torture."

"Calm down--this discussion is a 'what if' scenario. You are not actually in Hell. If you chop up people, they will die, and you will go to jail for the remainder of your life. Do you understand?"

"Oh sure. How soon can I get out, doc?" Then the spark went out of his eyes and bloodshot rivers began pulsing in its place.

"You mind-fucking bitch. You almost made me believe I could leave. You made me think there was more outside, when this is it. This room is my Hell, my consciousness is my Hell, my body, my pain...this is it, and I'm trapped without a prayer for redemption."

"Look--"

"What kind of Hell are you in, doc? What did you do to wind up here? Why don't we spend eternity reflecting on that instead? We already know how I got here."

At least now I knew the urgent necessity of convincing Luther he was not in Hell. If his plans were to hurt people when he got out, then he would never be allowed to leave. But, instead of considering that his institutionalization would mean the safety of myself and others, I thought only that he would be right. He would never get discharged: he would remain in this hospital, his personal Hell, indefinitely.

Because the hospital became overcrowded and understaffed, I was no longer required to see Luther everyday. I was grateful for the relief; it was becoming increasingly exhausting to talk with him, to resist being overcome. All of my arguments were countered by his.

I still thought about him nearly every moment, I was not surprised when I began dreaming about him. I did not realize that most of the nightmares were from deep within my subconscious.

There was one particular nightmare in which I constantly found myself

entangled; however, in the midst of it each time, the panic I experienced felt like a terror I had never before encountered. I would dream that I was in Luther's place. I would be trapped in his hospital bed, attached to ropes and pulleys, and completely unable to move.

"Help me, please," I would say to the nurses.

"What is she saying?" they would ask one another, "'Fell, well, tell, dwell?' Jibberish. She's crazy."

I would become more afraid, not being understood, and try more frantically to communicate, "I can't move anything! Help me, please!"

"Fed, wed, red, dead, dread?" Better get the doctor--she's becoming agitated."

I would try twisting and stretching to free myself from the invisible anchor which pinned me, immobile, to the mattress. Next, the nurses would inject liquid, prickling flames into my veins which scalded and shredded even the insides of my fingertips. Then Luther would appear through the doorway in a labcoat.

"MARY MACDOLIN!" he would say. "AND HOW ARE WE DOING TODAY?"

By this point, my face would feel numb and my teeth would seem fused together.

"DON'T YOU REMEMBER ME, DOCTOR? I WAS A COLLEAGUE OF YOURS WHERE YOU INTERNEED, AT LEAST, I WAS UNTIL MY ILLNESS. YOU HELPED TREMENDOUSLY IN ENDING MY TORMENT. I'M SO VERY GLAD I CAN RETURN THE KINDNESS."

He would take a sharp instrument from the bedside table as a nurse held an anesthesia mask over my nose and mouth.

"NOW BREATHE DEEPLY AND WHEN YOU WAKE UP, HEH-HEH, EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL BETTER. I PROMISE. READY? 100, 99, 98..."

97. 96 9594stopstopstopstopstopstopstop

"Stop!!"

I would awaken with a lurch and the nightmare would be over. I would grab a pen and then scribble new details or insights on whatever was handy, including my bedsheets and legs. That is what always happened, except for that last time. Fears confirmed, my dream did not end when I finally screamed.

It did not continue in the hospital, but in my bedroom. It was nighttime, and Luther stood across the room, arms folded. His bandages were removed, and cuts and bruises were healed, yet he still wore his hospital gown.

"YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS, DON'T YOU?" he said.

"No, I don't. How did you get here--you're paralyzed. What happened to all your scars? Where is your brace?"

I sat up and pulled the sheet around my shoulders. It seemed suddenly too cold for a July night.

He shook his head and smiled, saying, "THAT WAS PART OF *YOUR*

ILLUSION. WHAT DID YOU THINK OF IT? AND HOW ABOUT THIS BUTCHERED HAIRCUT--IT GREW BACK UNEVEN FROM WHERE IT 'HAD TO BE' SHAVED. NICE TOUCH, EH?"

"I don't understand. Are you a ghost? Did you die tonight?"

"I DIED A LONG TIME AGO, BUT TIME IS RELATIVE."

"Luther, you did not die when you jumped off that fire escape! You lived!"

"DID I SAY ANYTHING ABOUT KILLING MYSELF? I DIED IN A HOSPITAL WHERE YOU, AS A STUDENT, WERE INTERNING. YOU MADE A MISTAKE THAT YOU NEVER ADMITTED TO ANYONE, EVEN YOURSELF. NO ONE KNEW YOU MIGHT BE TO BLAME UNTIL AFTER IT WAS TOO LATE AND YOU WERE GONE. YOU JUSTIFY ANYTHING THAT DOESN'T JUSTIFY ITSELF, DON'T YOU?"

"YOU HAVE ONLY BEEN A DOCTOR IN HELL. YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD BURIED ALL THESE MEMORIES DEEP IN YOUR MIND, BUT NOW IT SEEMS LIKE THEY'RE DROWNING YOU, INSTEAD OF THE OTHER WAY AROUND. YOU ARE HERE AS MUCH AS I AM, DOCTOR MARY MACDOLIN--ENJOY YOURSELF: I KNOW I AM. YOU FAILED. HOW DOES IT FEEL TO KNOW YOU'RE WRONG AND I WAS REALLY RIGHT ALL ALONG?"

I tore open my eyes and gulped for air. Only then did I realize Luther's visit had been a dream--a very terrifying, very real dream.

The remainder of that night I spent awake, thrashing about in my mind between what I could do, wanted to do, and had to do. The next day I would prove first, that I was right, he was not dead, and second, that he was wrong, I was not in Hell. Proving both arguments were for my benefit, not his. With this realization came my acceptance that Luther had successfully swept me up into his reality. Supporting this fact even further was my extended dream: he explained how and why I was in the same position as he. But I didn't kill anyone, and I wasn't dead and in Hell. I couldn't be. It just could not be possible..Then why did I have the feeling I needed proof too?

Early the following morning, I dressed for work as usual, packed my usual lunch, and started the day like any other typical Monday. I did, however, make an extra stop at the nurses' station to pick up something I needed. I made sure no one saw me do this. Then I silently and grimly entered his room.

"What? No, 'Hello, Luther, how are you?'"

I smiled and replied, "That's the biggest verbal response you've ever given when I've come in."

"Red letter day, doc."

"Yes, it is."

I observed him closely, looking to see any flash of recognition which would be a clue to me that he knew about my dreams. I could not shake the feeling that he did.

"Guess what I have for you," I began.

"A wonder pill to make everything better and get me out of here."

"Close," I said, taking the empty syringe from my coat pocket, "I have an injection that'll do the same thing."

"It's empty."

"Yes."

"Wouldn't that be 'fatal?'" he said with a sneer.

"It would be if you were alive, so you don't need to worry."

"I'm not."

"Luther, I couldn't prove you were alive, and up until now, I couldn't convince you that you weren't dead. But in a few moments I will deliver indisputable proof by taking away your life. I can't take what you don't have, can I? You will personally witness your change from a living being to a non-living being, or into whatever else happens. Then you can look back and see that I was really right all along, and my only intention was to help you. By injecting air into your vein, it will look like you experienced natural heart failure which, considering all your injuries, would not be surprising. And your blood will be absolutely clean for the autopsy."

I paused, waiting for him to react, to admit something, to reveal his thoughts. I doubted that he needed confirmation of his Hell, or that he had come to think that I was right. He might have wanted me to try killing him so I would personally witness that he could not die; he would want the satisfaction of proving that I was in Hell with him. It was too late to consider that maybe he knew he was never dead, and that he also knew he could eventually push me to perform the one act which would give indisputable evidence. If that were the case, this would be his chance to attain the death he originally wanted, but this time without responsibility, sin or guilt. Or, maybe he was really allowing me to seal my own eternal fate. As these thoughts churned in my mind, I ultimately came to one conclusion: by doing this, I would be ending his torment. By doing this, I would be ending mine. Finally, when he said nothing, I heard myself speak.

"Ready, Luther?"

"Do it."

Biting my lip, I plunged in the needle, shut my eyes, and prayed he would die.

"Welcome to Hell, Luther," I said.

"Welcome to Hell, yourself," he replied.

Cara O'Hare

*I bet you thought this was gonna be a poem about a rock. Well it's not.
It's about three little kids watching two hippies getting stoned at a beach.*

I.
the origin of vampires:
yeah
they would bury people alive
and sometimes someone would
dig 'em up before they died and
the light from the sun was too much
for them so they'd freak out
and go after people and people would say
OH SHIT THIS IS A VAMPIRE.

II.
the realness of rocks:
all rocks are real

III.
did it in carr's pond
did what in carr's pond

IV.
it's weird having someone
record your every word
i like it
your artistic rush inspires me

V.
the origin of religion: superstition

VI.
what
i said i don't want to think
about it
i'm alive
when your time comes

you know it
you can't change it
you just have to trust it

VII.

yeah
but
i
still
don't
know
what
you
did
in
carr's
pond

VIII.

the ultimate drug experience:

PARANOIA

oh shit

oh shit
it's a vampire
crawling on the rocks

IX.

drive a stake right thru yo heart

X.

poets should write in the dark

XI.

you know
your car should
go
in a hall
of fame

XII.

religion
superstition
call it what you want
i still say
all rocks are real

XIII.

i wonder
if those kids
are still
watchin' us

Andrea Parrella

For #9

We share a room, you and I

the stem of your dreams is
a Laura Ashley floral and
your skates are hockey-
puck black.
Your desk calendar for Tuesday
reads "Do eyebrows 6:00" and

I can do yoga

on my thinning quilt of
machine-dyed purple and
unravel its stitches with
my nails; with my eyes

I can skate

on the ruffle weaving
around your bedframe
like the work of a
defective cOmPass, and
feel comfort
knowing that
it holds the shape of
an ice-rink, not a figure
8. And though a compass

to be a compass

must produce a circle, I know
the oval ice you and

I skate upon

is solid, that even the

cOmPass, useless to a
mathematician,
can create a whole

figure

geometric

Jagdish Seat

The bulimic upstairs is
vomiting again--
she runs the water because she
thinks it'll drown
out the sound
she hasn't yet realized that
she's wretching into a
porcelain megaphone
I'm glad I don't have
problems like hers--
no fingers of mine are
shoved back to hook
the base of my tongue
whenever I can't sleep I take
these pills my mom's doctor
prescribed for her
I think they make me hallucinate
but I'm not sure--
I could've been dreaming when I
saw salamanders limbo under
a flaming shish kabob, and
those lavender blueprints for
building a hippo seemed
really too real, too--
although a dainty brontosaurus
tried to tell me otherwise
(he traced letters in the sand
on my chest)
Unfortunately he's dyslexic so
it's not my fault I couldn't
decipher his jumbled scrawls--
I'll have to buy another
pair of @*#! yellow socks tomorrow.

Engaged

Resting the phone in its cradle, she slipped back beneath the safe quilted covers. In the dark, he lay silently breathing. She said for him it was only midnight-California time.

"I probably should've motored out," he balled up like a baby would.

"We can see other people", she tried to comfort him. "I do." He tensed as she began to rub his back. Glaring over his shoulder he watched her blink twice slowly -- a silent demand for a kiss.

Hesitating he twisted himself around to oblige her, his eyes kept silently open. Tousling his hair yielded to fingers that slid through all his waiting strands. All felt good but all was not all right. He could still taste the hour old champagne in her kiss and it began to make him queasy. Shifting gears, he asked if she met all her men on trains.

Locking her eyebrows she looked down on him and stalled.

"Why so many Jokes?" she asked.

"Oh, this just happens to me all the time," he giggled, "that's all."

Ducking her playful punches, he countered with an accelerated drive up the sides of her untucked shirt to caress and maybe tickle her as well. The soft grain of flesh felt warm to his hand; it was smooth like a polished dashboard. He let his hands be dragged up the subtle bump of each rib to the point where night shirts can easily be removed.

Ringling, a phone was unplugged and she was again hunched over him ready for another round. Through the tunnel of her hair he saw only her eyes, her gauges, and they were now in demand of full attention or maybe explanation.

"Do you think that's him?"

"No. He only calls once; plus we have...an understanding." Her soft cooing whisper birthed a couple of gentle kisses.

"I don't know about this," he mumbled feeling unwanted. "It's like there are things I want to tell you but can't." His toes twitching, he looked like a baby who can't get to sleep.

"Why, because of him? Don't be guilty. I just know him better."

"Know him better! Of course you know *him* better! Oh, I don't know anything!" Blocking his fists over his eyes, he wanted his childhood to be over. His arms were ready to cuddle closer but he needed more details to color in his pictures of her. She told him her favorite color, how many kids she'd have,

and where she wanted to live. Detailing, she sounded to him like she was reading from a book; the more she talked the less he learned.

Sitting up in bed, he bumped his head against the cinder block wall. Rolling away from him, she peered out the window and into the darkness. No light shined from anywhere. Maybe it was a power failure.

“So what do we do now?” he broke in with child like wonder.

Tweaking his nose, she silently stretched to the disc player. She beamed in triumph as the disk they had bought together slid into the machine.

Knowing that this would be his last lap with her, he finally became pacified. The anger that had built up inside him was quietly stripped away as he grew more content. Still, looking at her ring, he imagined how it would be to have her as his own. “Nobody owns anybody or anything”, he thought.

Crooning the opening bars to “Witchcraft,” Sinatra wiped out all thought and left only rhythm:

These fingers in my hair/ that she come hither stare
that strips my conscience bare/that’s witchcraft

Surrendering soon after, his eyes blinked twice, then he closed them tight and let it all just happen.

Kristen Alsfield

Phantom

Mrs. Applebaum knits one and pearls two as the young boys
outside dig a deep hole in the soft dirt and she hopes as
they smile and jaunt with half-toothed grins that they
are simply
exploring
and not attempting to bury.

She is smearing velvet blues and azures to cover the
crevices surrounding her hazel-flecked eyes which could
be evil and
low
and the shiny mocking shadows crawl down her crackling
face and she remembers the magician with the sardonic grin.

"A magician," they said, "Is someone who makes you see what
isn't there. Even better, covers what is there so that you
think it's something else."

"Why yes," said Mrs Applebaum, "do magicians exist?"

"Perhaps," they sang, "perhaps perhaps..."

Mrs Applebaum covered her nose and throat so as not to breath in the
delirium.

Cara O'Hare

S. Goldstein: 145 East 16th Street

Do you know how many
S. Goldsteins there are
in the Manhattan
phone directory-

nothing to distinguish
one from the other.

Except a middle initial
here & there.
Didn't help, though.

You never told me your middle name.

If it were up to me
it would be Iris
cause there were never any
in Brooklyn
& you loved them so.

Saw one the other day.
Thought of you.
When we first met:94,
humid.
Reading a book of poems,
Just like a real Italian Kid.

You were amazed: woman
sitting on her front stupe, alone,
laughing.

You said hello.
I offered you
sausage & peppers.
You respectfully declined.
Still, you enjoyed the chianti.

No One

slit a throat
with veggie-peeler
chill drips
serve at room temp
at parties
with triscuits
& brie

so

the toilet paper dispenser is askew
the freeway lights
raped you
on route 44-
you wouldn't take the exit
for asylum avenue
you fucked it up
this time
rattle your life
like a maraca
-empty barrels make the most noise-
shake it
the mesa-voice
invisible scratches
razorburn
the knock at the door-
c.o.d.
thru the mailslot
blank envelopes
thru the window
other windows
looking back
infinite regress
hook up
the tweeter & woofer
broadcast the snow
the static fizz

fizzle
the ghost in my machine
keeps me warm
loves me
tells me
 i'm a hot tamato
 doesn't bother
 with flowers --
 doesn't need to
people look at me as if i am
 the street musician
 the store clerks
hello may i help you-
 you?
 who?
 yoo-hoo-you
 in the ripped sneakers
 &argyle socks-
 don't you answer?
 you floating wardrobe,
 you hanging garden
 run by remote control-
wires, mostly-gadgets-
he's not
that's the ticket
 he's
 not-
 not passing your open guitar case
 depositing slugs
 not
 test-driving buckled boots
 in your shoe department
 not inhaling
 not exhaling
 not using his aqualung
 not taking the proper scuba precautions
 not wearing special glasses
 during the eclipse
 please don't leave me
 don't vacate
i've seen him somewhere before
the blondie
with the proganthic jaw
don't go
& if you do

Ray Jordan

*Pied Piper Sonnet
for Squeaky*

A crossed tooth obliquely lures
the eyes are extruded from their orbit
in a blood-shot state we ease
another acre bulging praline
simultaneously a child pretends
heatstroke under the sweltering balcony
money pours like crowd response to neon

sign out front in thumb-clutch we link
by the muddy river that echoes
our names lice the summer pulse
in buckthorn choose sides in Vieux Carre
with moss and wafer pulls apart sex
parades its miracle forgery
earth moves to the adjoining rain

"The Swing"

She went every Monday; it was her church. Everyone knew Julianna there and she felt comfortable and safe. It was her time to escape, to let herself go and forget. Even though it was only a few hours a week every visit was necessary and with each one she found it more difficult to tear herself away. As soon as she entered, Julianna knew today was different and that she wouldn't be able to leave as quickly as she must.

She followed her usual routine beginning with Botticelli. Her favorite was "The Birth of Venus." She could stare at it for hours losing herself in its beauty. Julianna wished she was the Goddess Venus being adorned by angels throwing petals of flowers. Julianna imagined the power she would have as a goddess. In her scenario there was no pain, everyone was pleasant and peaceful, aiding one another's joy.

Glancing nervously at her watch, Julianna moved quickly through the diverse halls that had become her second home. She next came upon Renoir, or as she called it "The Gay Gallery" because all the people in his paintings seemed so happy. The outdoor parties filled with dancing, drinking and flirting all seemed so remote, especially now as Julianna thought how long it had been since she had any pleasure. She imagined herself on one of the grand terraces mingling with all the party goers. People began to stare at Julianna as she openly conversed with the painting, but she couldn't help herself.

"Oh, thank you Mrs. Whitney," she said. "I just threw the outfit together. Splendid evening isn't it?" Julianna's longing for companionship overcame her inhibitions in public. She never even noticed the woman and child beside her that, upon listening to Julianna, moved quickly to the next painting.

Anxious to spend the most time with the Baron, Julianna decided to skip Monet and entered Fragonard's room. Attempting to whet her appetite she briefly scanned his early works but none stimulated her as much as "The Swing." It was the only 16th century painting that encompassed a whole wall, and for Julianna it was bigger and better than life itself. It had become her new life, a life of goodness and laughter. In college she learned that it was French, she believed a Roccoco style. The painting was of a French garden, full of lush green bushes where the lady of the house would secretly meet her lover the Baron. It showed a beautiful lady seated in a swing who appeared to be flirting with her lover as her servant pushed and guided the swing. Julianna was obsessed with "The Swing." She loved everything about it: the colors, the

theme, the warmth she felt as she lost herself in it.

Unable to control herself, Julianna entered the painting. Suddenly she was on the swing dressed in the delicate pink gown and lily white bonnet. She laughed and threw off her shoe hoping the Baron would catch it. As her man servant pushed, Julianna flirted with the Baron.

"You know, Baron, you really must go. My husband could catch you here and then we would certainly be in a mess."

On one knee the Baron begged pitifully, "Leave him Julianna and run away with me. You don't love him, you know you love me."

Teasing him she answered, "Love you? Huh, maybe just lust you."

"Stop teasing Julianna and tell me you love me."

"I do love you, Baron, but for now this is all we can have. I have made a commitment to my husband and I will not break it. Now, let's not talk anymore about such serious matters." To her servant she addressed, "Push slower Henry, I believe the Baron is looking up my dress." Throwing her head back carefree Julianna laughed hard, she was enjoying herself immensely.

"Julianna?" the security guard interrupted, "Are you okay? It's 5 o'clock, the museum is closed. We've got to clear out the place." Opening her eyes she realized her time was up and she had to go.

As she rounded the corner of her street Julianna saw that the Bronco was already in the driveway. "Shit," she thought, "I'm late." She grabbed the bags from the trunk and rushed toward the house. She ran so fast that she wasn't paying attention and tripped over the garden hose. Immediately, she dropped to her knees and rolled up the hose placing it perfectly in its holder. She then picked up the watering can from the middle of the patio and put that in the shed. She glanced at her beautiful garden, smiling, and then quickly surveyed the rest of the yard. Reassuring herself, she uttered out loud, "It's okay, everything is in its place." Before entering, she stopped at the back door and reapplied her lipstick. She wasn't sure why but she always put on a new layer to greet Joe.

He had already assumed the position in his chair, remote in hand. Julianna was impressed, he even got his own beer. The door slammed behind her as she attempted to sneak into the kitchen at which point she received, "Where the hell were you and better yet, what's for dinner?" Timidly Julianna explained, "Joe, I'm sorry. The A&P was swamped. But everything is all made, all I have to do is heat it up." "Jesus, Jules, it's not like you work all day. Is it too much to ask for dinner to be ready when I get home? Hurry up, I'm starving. Toss me another beer too, my day sucked."

After putting the casserole in the oven, Julianna gazed out the window over the sink. Looking at her garden she again found herself lost in her other world. She closed her eyes and there she was, being pushed back and forth. The Baron had now caught her shoe and was attempting to throw it in the fountain unless Julianna kissed him. She sat there and laughed. She felt so good that she never even noticed Joe behind her getting another Heineken. Beer in hand, he grunted sarcastically, "Thanks I got it myself." Then looking

at her still high off her fantasy he asked, "What are you smiling for?" Snapping out of it, Julianna immediately dropped her head to her chest. By the tone of his voice Julianna knew he wanted to start a fight. She answered quietly, "Oh-uh nothing, just thinking." Getting angry, Joe continued, "No, why are you smiling and looking so dreamy? You got someone you're thinking about? Huh? Who is it? Someone from that queer museum you go to all the time instead of taking care of our house?" This was routine, he always accused her of cheating. He was paranoid again, out of control. Throwing the beer against the refrigerator and then grabbing her by the face Joe screamed, "Come on, who is it?" For the first time in a long time Julianna raised her head and looked her husband in the eyes. "Actually Joe," she said with a smirk, "I was just standing here thinking of a nice gentleman I met today at the museum. He was very sweet and he made me laugh."

1:30 that morning Julianna drove herself to the Emergency Room. Everyone knew her there as well. She was relieved that she only needed five stitches. On the way home she realized that tonight was the only time she understood why she was beaten.

Mike Tata

when vowels double park

s	a
o	e
m	i
e	o
t	u
i	a
m	e
e	i
s	o
y	u
s	a
o	e
m	i
e	o
t	u
i	a
m	e
e	i
s	o
y	u
s	a
o	e
m	i
e	o
t	u
i	a
m	e
e	i
s	o
y	u

Critic's Choice

I'm going to tell you the story of Trenton Theodious Burke, the world's (and I do mean the *world's*) greatest writer. Or so he thought. The rest of the literary universe had a different idea, namely that Trenton Theodious Burke couldn't write his way out of a plastic sack. But they never told *him* that, no siree, they never told *him*. "But why?" you ask, you ask, all innocent peaches-and-virgin-vanilla-cream, "*why* didn't they tell him?" Well darling, because they were trying to be nice, that's why.

See it all started in school. (That's where all trouble starts, the way I see it. The more people know, the more kinds of trouble they can get themselves into.) It was at school that Trenton had the unfortunate accident of getting inspired. A newly hatched English teacher, fresh out of College and not yet wise in the ways of young minds had it in his head that if he told everyone of his students that they were a good writer they would feel so encouraged that they would actually become good writers. It was a kind idea, but it had devastating effects on Trenton. So there's poor Trenton, never been athletic, or good looking, and so shy he's scared of his own reflection, and he thinks he's finally found something he's good at. Now, don't get me wrong, Trenton was a bright boy, very clever, and he *could* write. As long as all you cared about was grammar. But Trenton wanted to be a *writer*; he wanted to "explore the souls of men," and "capture the human experience".

It's just too bad he didn't have anything to say.

So Trenton went and got himself inspired. He worked real hard and made it into a good college and jumped pen-first into the world of literature. He read, he studied, he wrote. And his professors all liked him because he just ate up every word they said. He was like a little St. Matthew following around Dr. Jesus and scratching down everything that flowed from the Holy Man's mouth. He was a hard worker, and to reward him his professors gave him good grades, and they told him (with their fingers crossed) that if he kept it up, he'd be a success someday.

Trenton got out of college with a degree in English, and a soul so fired up to burn down the world with his novel that he didn't even bother to look for a job. His mother wasn't exactly overjoyed to have him back with her, but then again she was his mother and felt that obligated her to take him in. For ten years he holed himself up in his room doing nothing but writing, and when he came out he was twenty-two pounds lighter, six shades paler, and he held

in his hands eight hundred and twenty-three pages of what would soon be the world's greatest novel. Only no one wanted it. It wasn't that it wasn't good-Trenton's technique was impeccable. His characters were round when they had to be round and flat when they had to be flat. He showed; he told; he revised. He had a theme from day one, and his story had so many layers it would have taken ten archaeologists a hundred years to dig through them all. But he just didn't have anything to *say*. That book was so boring you fell asleep half way through the title. And no one had the heart to tell him that even as a doorstep it would've put the door, the rug, and half the solid oak floor to sleep.

But he tried, poor fellow, he *tried* to get it published. He sent his manuscript to forty-six different publishers, and of those that even bothered to send it back, not a single one said, "Sorry son, put me right to sleep." Not a single one. And Trenton just kept on trying.

He spent three years trying to get that book published, and every day that the sun went down on an empty mailbox Trenton got a little bit older, a little bit sadder, and a little bit closer to failure. His dream was dribbling away faster than ice cream down a three year old's chin and he didn't even have a napkin.

One day he did get a letter back from one of those publishers. And Trenton saw that envelop and thought that finally, finally someone had seen the merit of his work. He filled the envelop with every hope and dream that he had left, and by the time he opened it, it had grown as fat and round as a bright red helium balloon. But it wasn't a letter of congratulations at all. The man who wrote that letter filled it full of enough hate to fill ten balloons. Hate not just for Trenton's book, but for every bad book that had ever been written. And how could Trenton, who'd never heard an ounce of criticism his whole life, understand that? A mean little boy had just run up and popped poor Trenton's balloon, and it was nearly the end of him.

But not quite. Trenton's mother saw my ad in "Writer's World" and called and told me the whole story. I run a treatment center for rejected novelists. Pretty specific clientel, I know, but believe me there's no shortage of them. They come to me disappointed, frustrated, and often suicidal, and I fix 'em up and send them home again. Most of them are like Trenton, lonely introverts who just can't handle rejection. They've spent their whole lives around people who through politeness, or kindness, or whatever, have never told them the truth. Not everyone is destined to be a great novalist, you know. When I say I fix 'em up, I don't mean that I turn them all into F. Scott Fitzgeralds, no siree. Everybody has a different calling in life, and I try to help 'em find out what it is.

I run my center out of a little cafe in the basement of a rooming house. I set the lost souls up in the rooms upstairs, and they come and work for me in the basement. I get them away from their families and out into the real world and life takes care of the rest. Plus I tell them the truth. Everyone here has to tell the truth, as near as they can reckon it. By the time these people leave here they're practically immune to criticism. They can take it and dish it out.

And Trenton, now he can take it as well as anyone here, but, boy, his true talent is dishing it out. He can bring tears to the eye of even the toughest old boy. We found his true calling, alright, and it ain't writing novels. It didn't take long before we found him a job, and a good one at that. He leaves today to start as a literary critic for the 'New York Times.'

Ray Jordan

Eleven O' Six
for Squeaky

Do we know time	Place the fundamental
whose awful	among the substances
appearances inflates	Are not the solidities firm
are certainties	A friend takes
of the moment	the card
is chance its	and still we lose
spectre	the sand

This poem has taken the words used in "1106", by Emily Dickenson, and reordered them; all the words from Dickenson's poem have been used, none added.

Eight Three Nine

Eighty pounds bear on my mind still
Fresh with the smell of your womanhood
unveiled before me finally flowering open
into my eyes and heart felt in my gut
one which doesn't always work making
me think about your Jesus-But then
I fall back in comfort thinking
Good only of you and simple faith.

Don't look back no U turn no overshoulder
not even a quick glance in a mirror
for a reflection the reasons are
too few to fully name them here
mostly though I want to go thinking
neither shed a tear. No devices
sending you away amongst a crowd
of strangers -- I turn and walk (not
very well) away leaving my conscious self
by your side and that's how I've
wandered the streets...alone without
even me.

The people around me don't even play
 my word game you played
 my mind game -- great thing not bad
But that was, now the pigeons poke
at me as the rain keeps a fallin.
 She at least says "Oh Brill" as
I trade her a 50 pea piece
 rain and mist just don't hold
meaning like the Prince's rose
without you. Now I don't want to
get wet or be blown off some
mound of magic. I just want some
sun to make me happy.

Ink

It was not uncommon for those older than me to bring me places without telling me where we were going. I became used to going along with whomever pulled hardest when I was too young to realize that by doing so I was forcing myself to become harmfully passive. I did not think that it was unusual the day that they packed me up along with a few of my things and brought me here.

If I knew where I was it would be easy for me to leave. I'm not sure where I would go if I could escape, but my destination would be far away from this place. I read in a book that was brought into my room one night by the maid that you could figure out where you are if you watch the sun going up and down, and if you chart the stars and such things. I still have that book somewhere I think, and maybe one day I'll get around to making charts.

It rains a lot during a few months of the year. Otherwise, the weather is quite nice. Because of the agreeable weather, the rooms of the house are connected by porches, and open hallways. When it rains it is miserable and I am allowed to stay in my room. When it is sunny and bright out, they wake me in the morning and push me out of my room. They think I'll just sit all day and do nothing. Then they lock my room. I walk about all day, but there isn't anywhere to go.

The yard is small, and it is surrounded with barbed wire. The man here says it is to keep others out, but the way it is bent I can see that it is to keep those inside in. Most days I can stand on the second floor porch and watch the school children going to and from their classes. I cannot see a lot of the road, but a lot of people and wagons and cars pass by. I can think about what it is like to be one of them.

One day the adults with whom I spent my earlier years came by to inquire about my well-being. The maid brought them over to where I was sitting in the dirt near the fierce dog's kennel. "You understand why we had to bring you here, don't you dear?" one of them asks. I try to look up at them, but they are standing with the sun at their backs, and I can see only their shadows, and a few leaves of the tree that they are near.

I looked back down at the ground; the sun was hurting my eyes. "I knew this was a bad idea. They never would have found her, no one would have known about her. We could have kept her with us. We didn't need to hide her," the woman said to the man, grabbing hold to his arm. They gave me a

yo-yo before they left. They cried a lot when they were there. I was not anxious to see them again.

I figured out that I could learn a lot of tricks with a yo-yo. I could tell by the way it bounced back and flew everywhere. The maid said that she put a book about yo-yo tricks in my room. I was going to look on my shelf for it, but instead I just played with the yo-yo like a little girl would until the string broke off because I was angry and I hit the wall with it. That made the fierce dog bark like crazy and I thought the man here was going to bite my head off. He just said, "It's an awful thing that it has to be this way." He tried to smile at me, but there was something about me which he abhorred. "They did it to me too," he said, as if to comfort me. "They'll hide you, then come for you one day and expect you to rule a world you've never been a part of." The man told the maid to make me stay outside for the night.

I thought that was strange. The man was usually very sure that I was in my room at the right time every evening. This night they let the stray dog out. This night they didn't even lock the gate. I sat up for most of the night thinking about leaving. I could have gone down the road to where the school children passed. I could have found someplace to go. I was going to leave, but before I knew it it was morning time. The man was not happy when he saw me, but he pretended to be, at least in front of the maid.

The rainy season has just begun. I found these writing things in a box under my bed. They must have belonged to the last person who stayed here, because I have never seen them before. I have enjoyed spending these days writing. There is a long, wet season ahead. I could write much more, or I could ask the maid for more writing things, but for now I must go because I am running out of ink.

Paul Trainor

Untitled

It yields not like lust to flesh,
nor to the fingers of my eyes.
It does not convex me
into a funnyhouse portrait
nor display the sideshows of my life.
It does not wrap the room around itself
like an ancient ruin in the mirror of time.
It is plain, smooth velvet sphere
on a pedestal four feet high.

A surface wrapped around itself reveals
and conceals what the wrapping wants.
Ah, that wrapping, that smooth velvet
makes for handling as surely as flesh.

The embossed card forbids: 'Do Not Touch'

Imagine a sphere forbidden
being thrown like a ball
or spun like a globe,
a sphere that cannot be cut by planes
or touched by lines going off on tangents!
Of what use is such a sphere?

It's a magician's trick:
Take a blank,
wrap it in the sight of the beholder,
place it on a pedestal four feet high,
then wave the wand 'untitled'
like a wink at the mind's eye.

The fingers of my eyes behold
a name unnameing itself
on a pedestal four feet high.

Mike Tata

kierkegaard finally flips

EITHER bigmac OR quarterpounder

WITH CHEESE

either/or
either/or
either/or
either/or

small fry?

EITHER

OR

OR

OR

OR

large

EITHER

EITHER

EITHE

R

filet-o-fish

mcpizza?????

mcDLT

EITHER

FLAME BROILED!!!!!!!!!!!!-----fried

Untitled

We had been in the city. I know that, for we were coming over the big bridge to take us back. And we were on the platform waiting for the green train and it was a hazy cloud-filled time of day, and as we stood we conversed. I noticed how infinitely high up the bridge seemed to be-- us hovering miles above our world and balanced in a wobbly train to take us there. And then there was the train. My friend got on the train, but then I was across the bridge on another platform and near opposite tracks: why could I not get on the train?

And I saw it move away. I thought my friend might have waved and I began to run. I thought that maybe I could catch the next train, but then I was sliding, sliding. The pole wobbled on the bridge which hovered over the city, and, on this barren scheme, I moved faster and faster toward my friend, and I moved even much faster---all the time sliding, sliding-- but I would not catch the train I could not see.

And besides, I was turning to a place where the tracks did not go: no platforms, now only traces of a pavement where the street had been before all of the crabgrass grew up everywhere. It is still colorless, but I slow and seem to be walking now in a worn path and it is a neighborhood that I have seen, perhaps visited, before because these houses are all so familiar. And I am coming up the street and feeling myself again beginning to move much faster, for I am aware of a presence behind me, which leads me up over the narrow, broken street and to the screen door, which closes in my face without my stopping to look at what only might be behind me. There are only white tufts of the thick, wild grass and it is everywhere and between everything to be tramped on, and I do. I tramp; I run so hard. And now, as I turn the corner, I think I see what is someone I recognize, but he sits far off, with others, by one of the massless, peeling, colorless houses that are turning white before me and there are no tracks for trains here but the wild grass seems to be gaining color around me. Where did the presence go? Was it ever behind?

I turn the corner, still moving. I think that there is sunlight filling above and far ahead. In the road distant, I see fences, and that ever-present grass, and I think that I see bricks as well. There were lots of bricks.

Dieter Weslowski

In March, One Day Before
My Daughter's Birth Date

fearing
for the olive-wooled
buds of the maple bleeding
clear
from where a sheered off
traffic sign
has wounded its flank.

Brendan Byrnes

Residues

I threw out your shit stained skirt today.
A ritual wrapped in jalapeno peppers
And biodegradable plastics burned
As an obscure offering-
But my closet is empty
and the socks on my feet smell like wet clay
and my head's a skinny squirrel
and I shriek at my thumbnail
as it splits down the middle
by the pressure of the pain
But your closet is a coffin
and the socks on your feet are your feet
and your head's an orange peel
and I scream at my veins
as they stiffen at the thought
of your sponge breasts turned to
grizzle rock meat
and i gag when eating roast
vomiting every other tuesday
and sleep with your skirt in my hands until morning.

The Kitchen Is Always Open

Bruce liked big dogs. That's why when he opened the door of Lana's apartment and saw a big doberman, he didn't flinch.

"Where did you get this big dog?" Bruce yelled to Lana, who was in the kitchen cleaning her nails.

"His name is Harold. Parker gave him to me", Lana yelled back. Bruce wanted to know who this Parker character was and why he was giving his wife a big dog like the one in the living room.

"I'm coming into the kitchen," Bruce warned. Bruce made a determined movement toward the kitchen but was stopped by a large cement structure where the kitchen entrance used to be.

"Where the hell did this large cement wall come from?" Bruce demanded in a no-nonsense tone.

"Oh that...Parker built it this morning," Lana explained. Exactly who is this Parker character and why is he building large cement structures in my wife's house, Bruce wanted to know. Harold was smelling his leg.

"I'm coming into the kitchen -- through the dining room," Bruce predicted, loud enough so that Lana would hear him through the cement wall. Bruce marched through the living room and into the dining room where he expected to gain easy access to the kitchen. When Bruce passed the china cabinet he was surprised to find a giant plaster sculpture of a naked Greek man.

"Who put this giant plaster sculpture in the dining room, damn it!" Bruce shouted. Harold stuck his head between Bruce's thighs.

"Parker built it this afternoon -- don't touch it! It's still drying." Bruce didn't touch the naked glistening body of the giant Greek statue, even though it blocked the dining room entrance to the kitchen. Bruce wondered who this Parker character was and where the hell he got off building naked Greek sculptures for his wife.

"I'm coming into the kitchen *right now*," Bruce stated with firmness he rarely used with Lana. Bruce opened the dining room window and climbed out onto the apartment ledge. When he was safely outside, Bruce shut the window with his left leg because it was about twenty degrees outside and an open window would send that heating bill sky high. Bruce inched his way carefully toward the kitchen window, gripping the brick face of the building wall with his fingertips. He was eleven stories up and he knew that if he fell there was a very good chance that the insurance company would think it was

a suicide. Bruce got to the kitchen window in a matter of minutes. He could see Lana at the table scraping the dirt from underneath her toenails with a tooth pick and wiping it on a piece of paper towel. Bruce couldn't tell whether it was the brand of paper towels he gave her coupons for because his vision was somewhat obscured by the steel bars welded into the window frame. Harold barked from behind the dining room window.

"Who put these fucking bars here!?" Bruce raged. He felt a quick pang of guilt for using such strong language, but he decided that such a word was necessary under the given circumstances. "I'll bet it was that Parker character!" Bruce proposed, letting his wife know that nothing was getting by him.

"Yes dear," Lana replied from behind the bars. Bruce had just about enough of this beating around the bush.

"Where is he? I want to speak with him," Bruce said, laying down the law.

"Who?" asked Lana.

"Parker!" confirmed Bruce.

"Oh, he's under the sink," said Lana, clearing things up.

"What's he doing under there?" Bruce demanded, before slipping from the ledge and grabbing the bars to prevent himself from falling to the street.

"He's fixing it, silly," Lana answered.

"Help," said Bruce dangling.

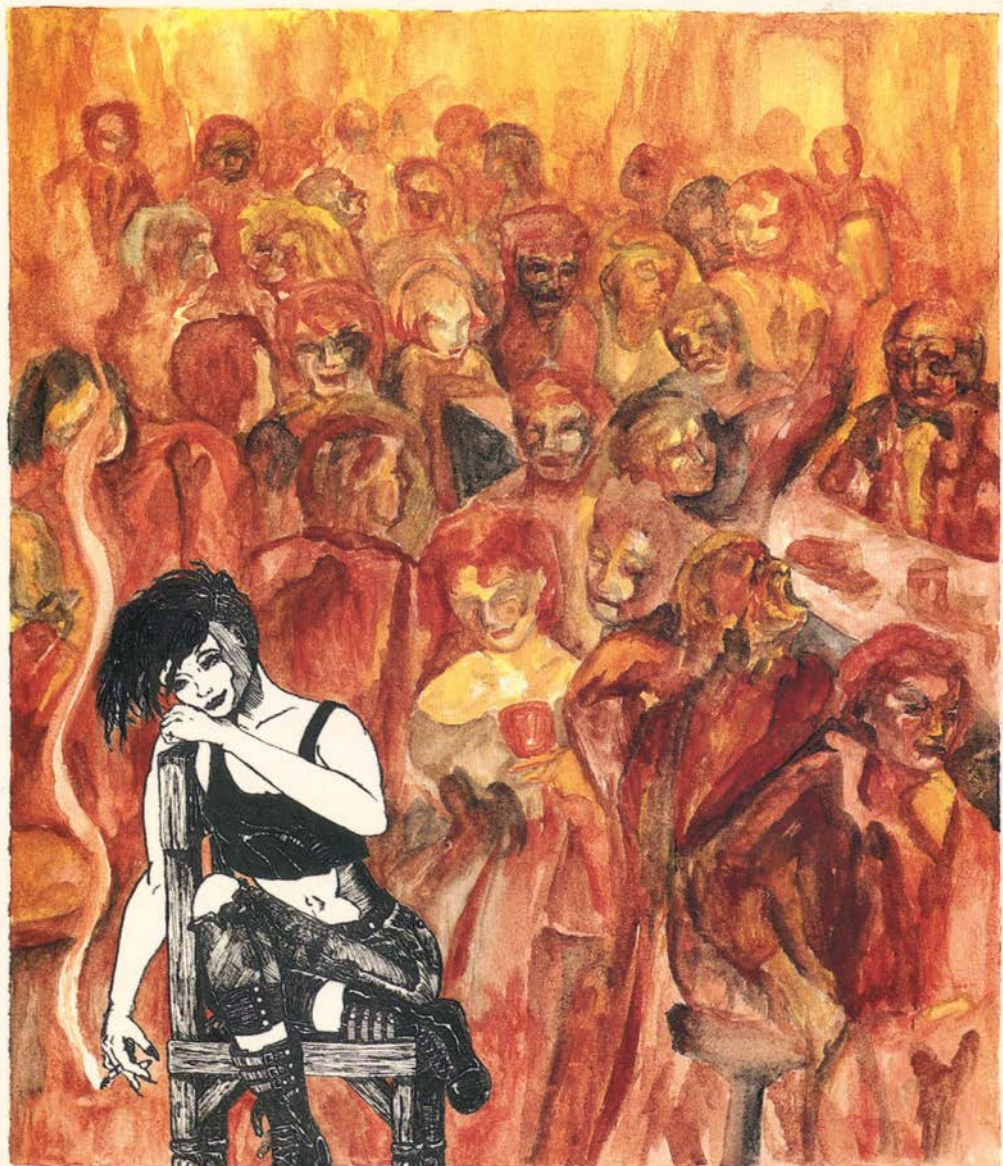
"You're too heavy. I couldn't hold you. I'll get Parker," Lana responded sagely. Bruce wondered whether he really was gaining weight. He only had a salad for lunch today. Harold barked up at Bruce from the street below. What he was doing outside by himself Bruce had no idea. A crowd was rapidly gathering below the window.

"Hello Bruce," came an unfamiliar voice. Bruce couldn't crane his neck far enough back to see who it was, but he assumed it was that Parker character his wife had been talking about.

"I want to speak with you Parker," Bruce said in what he thought was a very assured tone. He wasn't about to be intimidated by this guy.

"About what, Bruce?" Parker questioned. Bruce gathered himself for the assault.

"Just what in God's name do you think you're doing," he launched, "letting that dog roam the streets unattended?"



Phil B. Lawler 1991