



GREAT LAKE REVIEW

Fall 1991

Front Cover: *On Your Mark*, Caramia Donovan

GREAT LAKE REVIEW

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“There is such enormous pressure to conform in this society, and those of us who reject these singular models of how to live, how to write, how to fuck, how to make art, are on the other side of the world. We have new stories and new ways of telling them.”

— Amy Scholder, *from the introduction to High Risk*



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Figure

Renee Page

The Singer

Her voice is a buzzard alone
descending to poke at the bones
in the subway around her. A
careful initial nudge is enough to
show her; nothing, no flesh or
a single feeling is dangling from
these skeletons. Her voice is a
buzzard ascending alone to circle the
subway ceiling. It will fall back down
when hunger fills her again, when
the lyrics again speak of loneliness.

— Shannon Tuttle

Water Spirit

She, outside my window, dancing, was a figure so entrancing
That I found that I was staring at her floating, breeze-whipped mane.
Still she danced, her cape unfurling in the storm, wherein the whirling
Breezes seemed to send her twirling just outside my windowpane —
In the diamond drops that grew and crawled along my windowpane —
Was she just a trick of rain?

She was livened by the thunder pulses, dancing faster under-
Neath the clapping branches of the tree that scratched my windowpane.
Both the tree and she were bending in the wind. She started blending
Into the fog — the dance was ending and I feared I was insane.
As she melted, disappearing, I was sure I was insane —
For she was just a trick of rain.

— *Mortiche*

Your masterpiece

Am I to be your masterpiece, will
you hang me on your wall?
Or display my bronzed body, frozen
in animal-like crawl.
When I am to wield the powerful brush,
and my subject is my mind,
Will a masterpiece develop from the
crayon sketches you left behind?
And if I fail, then what? Tell me
what is it I am to do.
Do I become that poor apprentice
that I now see in you?

— *Garrett Wagner*

An excerpt from
Finite and Endless

by Alison M. Way

The first time I see him, he is standing next to me in the candystore staring at the jellybeans with a moonbeam glimmer in his eyes. To be sure, there aren't many people in this world who look at candy in such a way, but you must understand that he simply has those sort of eyes.

"The colors are beautiful . . . just beautiful . . ." he murmurs, his fingertips brushing against the smooth, cool glass of the display case. His voice has a resonance, a quality of depth to it, that reminds me of how people sound when they whisper to you in dreams.

"Yes," I reply, "and they taste good, too." It suddenly occurs to me that this is one of the most idiotic comments I could possibly have made - but then again, I don't even *know* this man so why do I *even care*?

"What tastes good?" he asks turning to me with a face so filled with bewilderment that I can't help but wonder if I've just spoken in Sanskrit.

"The jellybeans," I say, "I was talking about the jellybeans — they taste good, you know?" Once again he turns away from the captivating candy. He smiles at me — only, it isn't really a smile at all, it's much more than that. It's almost as if the features of his face are positively overcome with the beauty of life. It's the most glorious smile I've ever seen, but I hardly dare to let him know it.

Laughing, he says, "Oh, I wouldn't know about the jellybeans — their taste, that is. I buy them because of the colors — I just like to look at them, you see."

"Well, I suppose that's as good a reason as any other for buying jellybeans." I reply wondering to myself about the significance of this truly bizarre conversation, as I have always been one to search for deeply hidden meaning within the most trifling of circumstances. It has always been a wonderful way to lend substance to an existence lacking just such a thing.

The man smiles at me again, only this time the expression lacks much of its former pizzazz. He turns away from me beckoning to the bored-looking salesgirl for some assistance. Needless to say, she perks up visibly as she proceeds to weigh several bags of the colorful sweets, cracking stupid little jokes that make the man smile, if only just a little, tiny bit. So much for my disarming, charismatic wit.

I'm in the chocolate department struggling though a tedious, personal dilemma between the sponge candy and the chocolate-covered raisins, when I feel the gaze upon me. You know the feeling — that distinctly uncomfortable sensation of being watched by unseen eyes. You don't know who it is. You're not even sure why you noticed. You know only the unbearable weight of another's attention. I look up with a nervous start brushing my unruly mane out of my eyes as I look about in search of the hidden observer. True, I am accustomed to people looking at me, but one should not assume that this makes the attention desirable or somehow easier to bear. I am aware of the stranger's eyes upon me just as another would feel his flesh burning in the searing flames. The scrutiny is agonizing.

I am quite alone in my aisle, save for the old man a couple of shelves down who is far too preoccupied with fine chocolates to be the slightest bit concerned with me. Figuring myself to be quite the paranoid, I reach for the glorious box of chocolate delights only to come face-to-face with the eccentric jellybean man whose beauty appears as I remove my treasure from the shelf. Hidden in the next aisle, an aisle filled with gourmet jellybeans of every persuasion, he has been contemplating me from his hidden vantage point amongst myriad confections. I feel the beginnings of a downright crimson blush moving up my neck to conquer my face. I am absolutely incensed for no particular reason.

"What are you doing?!" I say, my voice a vicious mutter. He smiles and it's the brilliant smile he gave me before.

"I'm looking at you."

"Why?"

"Why? Because you're beautiful — and much nicer to look at than jellybeans . . . is that a good enough reason for you?"

"It hardly justifies such *blatant* ogling!" I curtly reply, hardly daring to let my gaze meet with his . . . for more than an instant or two, that is.

"Ogling!!!" he laughs and the flesh around his deep, dark eyes seems to crinkle up lending a sense of gentle softness to his stunning features. "Ogling!! — I just love it!! What a fantastic word!!"

I am beginning to wonder if there is, by any chance, a sign attached to my forehead stating *Welcome All Attractive Men of Dubious Mental Facility*, but I stay where I am — not moving as I listen to the purr of his laughter if only to humor him . . . and perhaps my own self.

He has stopped laughing now, still the humor lingers in his eyes as if to suggest that he is still laughing deep within himself in some happy, careless place. I want desperately to laugh with him, to share the splendor of a silly meaningless word in the midst of all my rather affected seriousness, yet just as I begin to feel myself letting go. I am suddenly aware of the customers who observe — who ogle us with a collective gaze of curious disdain. I know that I am blushing like a cat in a sandbox just as I know that all of these candy-crazed creatures are appalled by our over-the-counter discourse. I should really leave right now — I should leave and free myself from unnecessary troubles and even more unnecessary embarrassment.

" . . . Hey, are you listening to me? Is there a person behind that pretty face? Hello?" The stranger is waving a long-fingered hand in front of my face — indeed, he has been talking to me all the while and I have hardly heard a syllable. Suddenly, he disappears. His face is altogether absent from the space we called a gateway and I feel almost alone in my aisle that has suddenly filled with people. Then he is coming down my aisle, coming towards me in a tall, broad-shouldered, long-legged body that make me feel smaller, more fragile with each gaining step. I want to run away but I am quite confident that if I look down, I will find my feet buried in stony cement. Wearing a black turtleneck sweater and faded jeans, he looks sharp and confident in a way that suggests looking good comes easily to him. I feel nervous, my heart pounding in my burning chest like a militant drummer. He is so close that I can smell the fresh sensuality of his soap.

"Now this is much better than shouting at each other across boxes of candy," he says, then suddenly he becomes strangely pensive, finally exclaiming, "You're very beautiful, aren't you — your eyes are absolutely marvelous. Tell me, do you look very pretty when you cry?" He moves forward and though I am very flattered, I take a step back as if in reproach, hardly aware of my motivation. I want to say thank you. I want to tell him that I hardly cry at all, but instead I say, "I have to go. I really have to go — somewhere."

He begins to look puzzled, his dark, finely-arched brows crinkling up in a caterpillar of perplexity. Then he seems almost hurt as if I have disappointed him in some absolutely horrible way.

"No," he says, his voice a hesitant murmur of deliberation, "that's not true. You don't have anyplace to go. You just don't want to be here. You don't want to be with me. That's what you're trying to say, isn't it?" At this moment, I could hardly have believed that my face could get any redder. Still the flames climbed higher into the depths of my cheeks, as if to conquer a defenseless place. Everyone is watching us. Surely they sense the displeasure in his voice. They are probably wondering what I could possibly have done to disappoint a stranger so.

"Look," I say, pushing a few locks of the mess that is my hair behind my left ear, "I have to go. I don't know what you want from me . . . I'm sorry but I have to go." And I grab two boxes of candy. I'm not even sure that they're mine, but I grab them and I turn around and begin to make my way towards the cashier with a good deal of nervous determination. I know that I am behaving in a

positively obnoxious manner but if there's one thing this city has taught me, it's how to be rude without remorse.

Candy in tow, I head for the line at the register, confident that I have emerged altogether unscathed from yet another confrontation with a deranged madman. I wait in the lengthy line with a nervous soul, chewing on a hangnail as I watch the little boy in front of me picking his nose with an intensity of singlemindedness that I find most impressive.

"Tell me one thing . . . don't you feel it?" he whispers in my tingling ear and I whirl around gasping despite my self-restraint to face this stanger who refuses to fail in his pursuits.

"Don't I feel what?!" I cry out and then I realize that I am crushing the boxes of candy against me to stifle the pounding in my chest.

"Don't you feel it between us?" he insists and when he reaches out to grasp my arm, the contact makes me tremble. "Don't you feel something magical and pure that makes you just *know* we ought to be together. Can't you realize what has happened to the two of us?!" And he looks into my eyes and I am stunned by the magic that I see in them. They are eyes of the deepest, softest, blackest midnight and in the midst of all that endless shadow, an undeniable fire burns there. He looks at me and I know that I understand him . . . and I never want to look away, ever.

He returns my gaze in his calm, penetrating manner as if he were searching deep inside of me and taking his place within the most private, intimate recesses of my mind. I seem to want him there, deep inside of my soul. Still, I feel nervous and defenseless before him like a virgin who awaits the caresses of her first lover. I know what I want but I can hardly guess what to expect.

There is a shroud of thick, cotton stillness so deep around me that I no longer know what it is to be a customer waiting in line in a candystore. It's as if I have never done such a thing in all of my life. I become nothing more than a helpless victim to the gentle temptations of this stranger, feeling the undeniable release of my surrender as the worldly box of chocolates falls to the silent marble floor.

His great, willow-fingered hands seem to cradle my face, luring me up —leading me closer to the warm sanctuary of his wet, crimson-lipped mouth. He will kiss me, I think, and I watch as his thick lashes close over the passion in his eyes, as his lips part ever-so-subtly to take me in. I feel his hot breath falling moist upon my burning skin; I smell the fragrance of his body and I am reminded of a rainstorm in a dense, primeval forest, I want to be soaked with the rain as I wander beneath the ancient trees.

And then he is kissing me and I am kissing him back as if my life depends on it — indeed I am certain that it does. His mouth is warm and sweet and his tongue dips into me like a bee loves a nectar-filled flower, leaving suddenly to make me want him more.

Suddenly, like a ray of light that leaves a darkened room, the kiss is over and we are back in the candystore line where we have been all along.

"You are the one," he whispers in my ear and although I want to listen, to connect with him once again, I can hardly hear his soothing whisper over the hushed murmurs of disdain uttered by our onlookers.

Everyone is staring. Are they looking at me or is it the pile of truffles at my feet that enchants them so? Has our kiss kindled a passion inside each and every one of them? I seem to hold the leading role in this performance, yet, I can hardly remember my lines (if I ever had any) as I tremble beneath the censorious gaze of my audience. Each pair of sightless eyes seems to understand the ineptness I'm feeling upon this stage. They know that I do not belong here, that moments such as this one are a true rarity to the regularity of my existence. They know that I am faking it for they have witnessed the calamitous breakdown of my stifled composure. They know that I have never been kissed like that before in all of my life. I fear that I may hear the first brazen bleatings of mocking laughter at any moment. And so I run out of the store.

Bulletin

Twelve months hang limp in
my kitchen, beside
yellow, cutout, sin-

ful menus. I pin
up dead flowers, dried
twelve months. Hang limp in

your old age! Grey, thin,
wrinkled skin can't hide
yellow, cutout, sin-

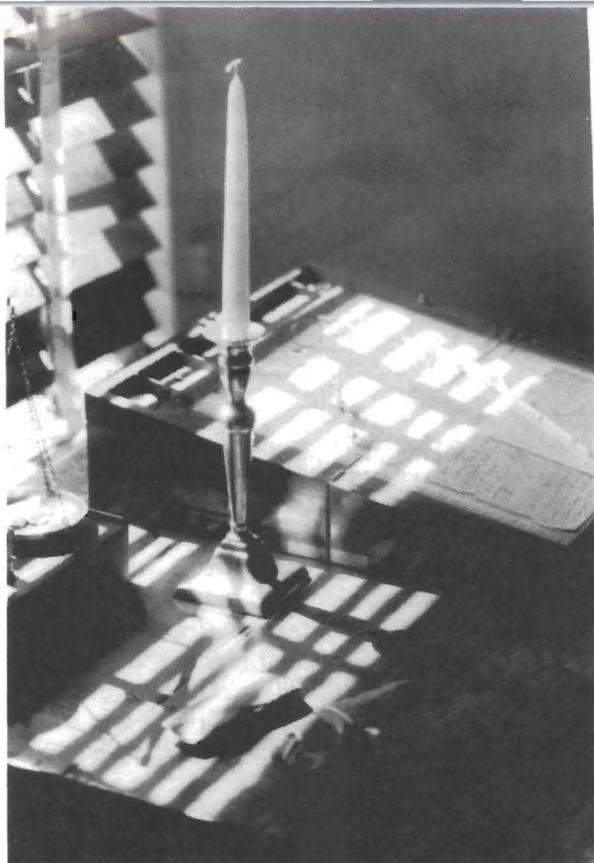
ister eyes. In min-
utes two cars collide;
twelve months hang limp in

a victim's head. Din-
gy graves are not wide —
yellow cutout, sin-

gle pits. Once again
widow becomes bride;
twelve months hang limp in
yellow, cutout sin.

— *Shannon Tuttle*





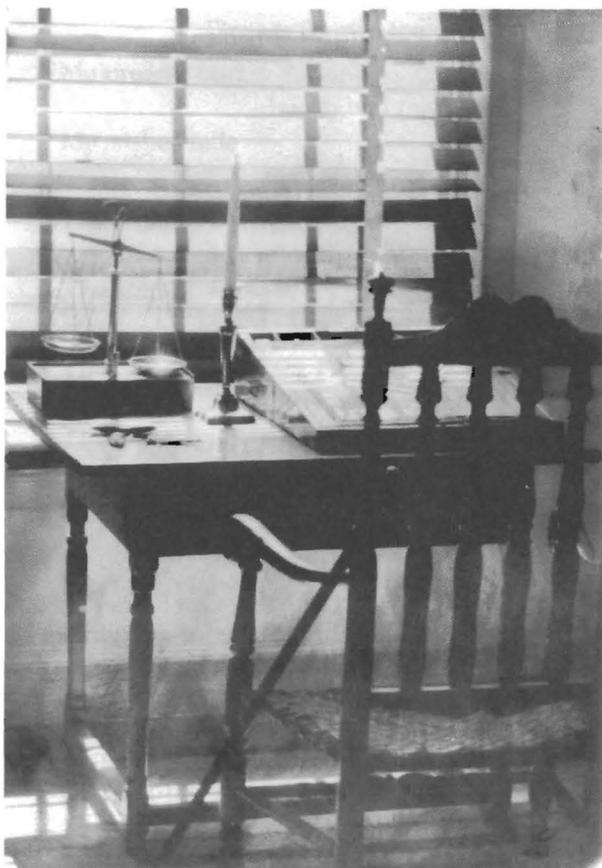
Thoughts Lost to Time I

Kimberly J. Baker

Hundreds of Grackles

The birds gather
And glide
And rest in the top of the tallest tree.
It is a cold December dusk.
They rise and circle,
Like a swarm of locusts,
Chattering
And lighting on another tree
And yet another.
Momentous decision.
Settled and huddled in the treetop of an elm,
They are silhouetted against the greying sky
Like dark seed pods clinging to the branches.
A curious lullaby,
The urgent chorus of bedding down
Serenades me
As I click my typewriter in fits and starts
And set my words upon the page.

— *Beverlee Salley*



Thoughts Lost to Time II

Kimberly J. Baker

Artemis' Swan Song

Stars are strewn along onyx aisles
in mute distraction
in their velvet chairs,
as the moon waits like a celestial spot-light
for the sun to steal the stage.

Battle-scarred and bludgeoned,
the moon's pale face softly limps
into the bosom of cloudy sanctuary.
Where it conduct the tides
and regulates the rhythms
of Waters
and Daughters.

Its mystery symphony only reverberates
within the jeweled chambers of the conch,
the racing dreams of sleeping Artists,
and the distilled fluids behind the eyes
of Lovers
and Lunatics.

Each dawn will witness the birth of the Beast:
The moon is betrayed and sacrificed
by the Resurrection in the East.

As all languid lunar remnants
burrow deep into the sea,
the sun exposes what is real
with raging mediocrity.

— Tom Fugalli

An Excerpt From:
THE GOOD CATHOLIC

by Laura A. Loncar

Morgan

(Crosses Herself) I'd start with the "Our Father" if I could remember it. I'm sorry God. Sorry for everything! I get sick to my stomach every time I think about it. What I did. I wanna vomit everytime I remember. *(Morgan leans over a bit as her stomach contracts in a dry heave)* Makes me sick. STUPID DOG! I didn't mean to . . . to hurt him. Not like I did. But he was in the way, he was there. *(She puts her head in her hands and thinks for a minute)* I can't think about it, Because it felt so good. *(She begins to weep uncontrollably)* It was wonderful. It was like a drug. I couldn't stop. I didn't want to stop. Hitting him and hitting him 'till he cried as hard as I cried. 'Till he hurt like I hurt. God! I can't live with myself. I didn't want to stop, God. And then I saw the blood. On my hands. On my face. And I thought, "What have I done," God, "What have I done!" and then I looked at him lying there, and you know what he did? He wagged his tail. He didn't know what happened. He thought he did something wrong, it was like he was asking MY forgiveness for ME beating HIM. I wish he got mad at me, tried to bite me . . . or something. But he didn't . . . he just lied there, crying. How many nights did I lie there crying. Because of what people did to me. And now I know how good it feels . . . inside . . . to hurt someone else. And now I know what I can do, how to hurt someone else so I feel better. But I don't ever want to do it again. I'm just so afraid . . . of myself. It felt so good . . . never again, God . . . Please! Never again.

Dream Sequence

My dreams bud
by my bed this night.
My wishes hide
high above my head.
The night
shall know my name.
The stars
shall whisper secrets.
The noise of laughter
lingers lightly.
The heaven marks
the moonlight madness.
Ice is twinkling
in the racing revelry.
Stars are restless
in the twirl of twilight.
Sweet is
the sing song of seduction.
Nothing is
as enticing as the new night.
The night dies,
as the light shines.
The day is
a fading dream away.

— *Liliana Almendarez*



A Spider's Web

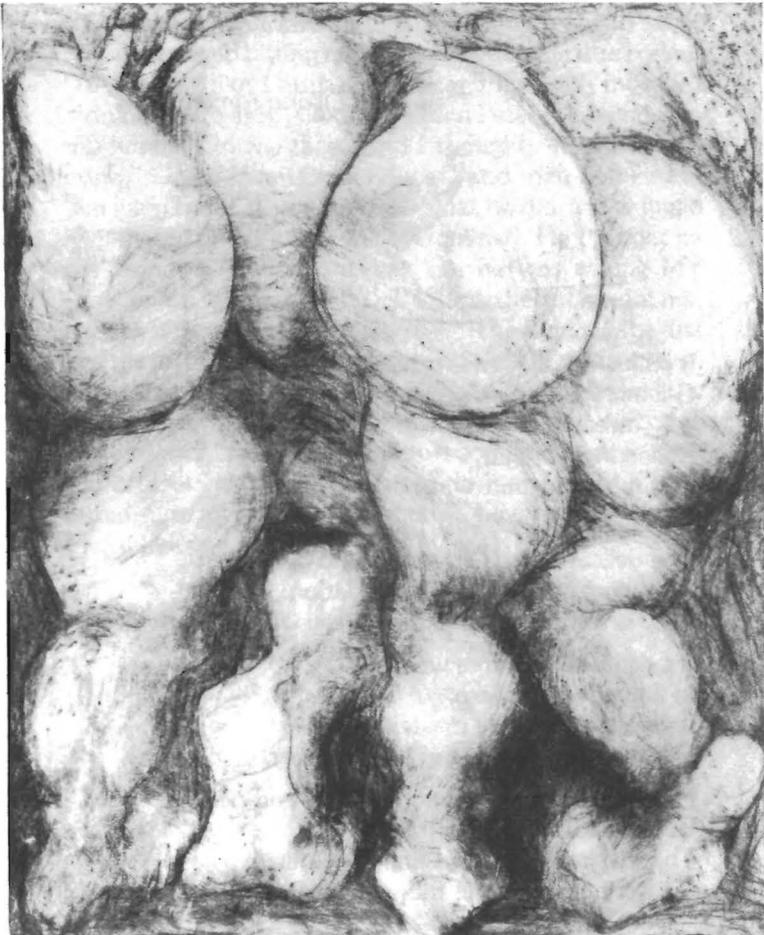
It spins, twisting and turning
Glistening, the Sun's first tears adorn its crystalline
threads.
Reflecting the light,
The tears emanate warmth and delight.
The wind sighs,
The delicate fabric stretches and bends,
Wrapping about a weak foundation.
Why is this Mother Nature's most beautiful creation?
It's geometric figures writhe
In a hypnotic pattern.
Its swift and deadly master
Gives it a feeling of fear, and disaster.
How could something so beautiful and perfect,
Be yet another deadly trap?
The master knows its entangling maze,
Gathering his prey in the early dawn's haze.

— *Jeffery R. Gardiner*

The Petrified Mother

Like an ancient shark
Moving through an ocean,
She monitors her dank world
Not knowing who her children are.
Love and hate merge and shrivel
For survival.
Any flesh is food.
Nursery rhymes and fairy tales
Are told at bedtime
Concealing and revealing
Truths and lies.
The children bleed in their sleep
But never show their wounds.
The old predator presides
In the sacrificial ocean,
Lullaby and goodnight.
The rigid birth canal,
The toxic breast,
The stroke of midnight,
And mother's kiss
Bestow the legacy
Of terror.

— *Beverlee Salley*



A.P.

Siu-Lin Phyllis Lee

The Light Bulb

by
Tania Gad

Her knees leaned against the hard tile, while she crouched over the bath tub scrubbing my little brother, Shaun, impatiently. She just seemed so far away from where she actually was. It scared me. I was only eight years old. I needed to know that nothing was going to change, and we'd always all be protected by each other.

I walked into the dim bathroom, five light bulbs worked the lamp, and only one was working. It was a perfect match for the line of questioning I was about to ask her, because out of the five people in my family, I was the only one working. I timidly began to ask her if she was mad at my father. I spoke to her as if she was tangled in explosives, and I had to watch every word that came out of my mouth for fear she might say, "Tania! Stop asking so many questions and get to bed!" She always gave me that line, and there was no way I could handle it at that moment.

All she did was splash the water abruptly onto my three year old brother, repeating, "I've got to get out of this house; I can't stand that bastard." She was crying; my mother was crying. "Nothing I do is good enough," sigh, sigh. "I can't do anything right. He should drop dead. I can't do it anymore; I just can't do it anymore." Oh the rush I felt through my body. I knew then there was no way we'd live together forever. But I still questioned her just so I could hear what I wanted to hear, you know, force the words into her mouth that said, "I will not divorce your father," because it was 8:30, and I had to go to bed, because there was school the next day, and those words were the only thing that could make me comatose for the night.

So I proceeded with the questions,

"Mommy, do you love me?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Do you love Darren?" (My older brother)

"Yes."

"Even when you yell at him?"

"Sometimes."

"Do you love me when you yell at me?"

"Sometimes."

"How come you don't love me when you yell at me, is it because I turn bad?"

"Yes, but I love you."

"Do you love Shaun?"

"Yes, of course."

Do you love daddy?"

"Tania, not now."

"But do you?"

"No, I don't."

"But why? Why did you get married if you don't love each other?"

"Tania go to bed."

I began bouncing and jerking my knee inside and out, whining, "Mommy. Please, oh please. I won't ask anymore questions, I promise. Just tell me, are you going to divorce daddy?"

"I don't know." Oh the salt from my tears was now burning my face.

"But mommy, are you or aren't you?" Inside my head I was thinking, oh please no, oh please God NO. What am I going to do if she says yes? Oh please God no.

I asked again; she yelled at me to leave her alone. I was surprised her fuse hadn't blown sooner. I then said, "Only if you promise me that you won't

divorce daddy.” She said, “We’ll see.” Eww, it was always “We’ll see.” I knew “we’ll see” always meant whatever I wanted wasn’t going to happen. I knew because whenever I wanted bubble gum, “we’ll see” was a wonderful means of postponing the time til we left the candy store so I wouldn’t be able to ask anymore. But I knew that was the best answer I was going to get that night, so I went to bed after counting all the people in the world who loved me on my fingers, and figuring out how old Shaun was going to be when I turned nineteen; he would be thirteen, and I was worried he would have to live alone with either my mother or father if they divorced, so I decided I would give free therapy sessions to every member of my family once a week, so I could heal whatever was wrong with my family.

It is now eleven years later. I knew then that things would never be the way I wanted. That rush in my stomach told me. And sure enough, I was right. My parents are still living together, and they’ve been trying to divorce legally for the past five years, while I went through high school. And damn it, I can’t wait until it’s final. I only wish my mother would have divorced my father after she gave Shaun his bath.



Black River

White foaming eddies
swallow my chartreuse lure and
spin our boat downstream.

— *Frank D. Hill*



The boy who couldn't finish a thing —
he would play ball with himself, throwing it up
and walking away without catching it, he'd reflect on
his actions consistently, only half way to the
point of actual recollection.

— *John Ceilly*



Two AM

Their hands laugh smoothly
along peach curves and dark curls.
Did they fall in love?

— *Frank D. Hill*

Devil's Rose

She'd heard the story from a guest
Who'd stayed at her parent's Inn in Lee.
For weeks, then months, they were hard pressed
To convince her it was not to be —
Satanic folktales held no key
To excitement. But, the story goes,
Late that night she vowed that she
Would dance until the Devil rose.

And danced she on, by the tale obsessed —
And on she danced, insane with glee —
And when she finally sat to rest,
She saw him, lost, beneath a tree —
Thought that he had heard her plea —
Explaining, then, she tore her clothes.
He, unused to such a free
advance — the little devil rose.

"Does your whole town go 'round undressed?"
To all he said, she did agree.
She thought, perhaps, it was a test —
And learned a lot beneath that tree.
(A bit TOO much — if you ask me!
Though he still hoped they'd come to blows)
An all too willing sinner, he
Had pricked her with the devil's rose.

"My, a friendly town is Lee —
Good thing just my doctor knows
About me." But a human, he
Then left her with the Devil's Rose.*

*(Devil's rose is an archaic term for syphilis.)

— *Mortiche*

i hear
just)
ice
d
r
i
p
p
i
n
g

from one
more sun;
raise

commonknowledge:

ilose(
uwin

a
(teenytiny)
gain.

— Tom Mayer

Faucet Dripping

Her morning coffee tastes silent,
as she sips it in her empty
house. She bites her nails and gazes
around and dreams empty dreams

of the life she would lead if the noise
would stop — the faucet dripping.
A man and boys invade the dream,
interrupt her sipping with kisses and hugs;

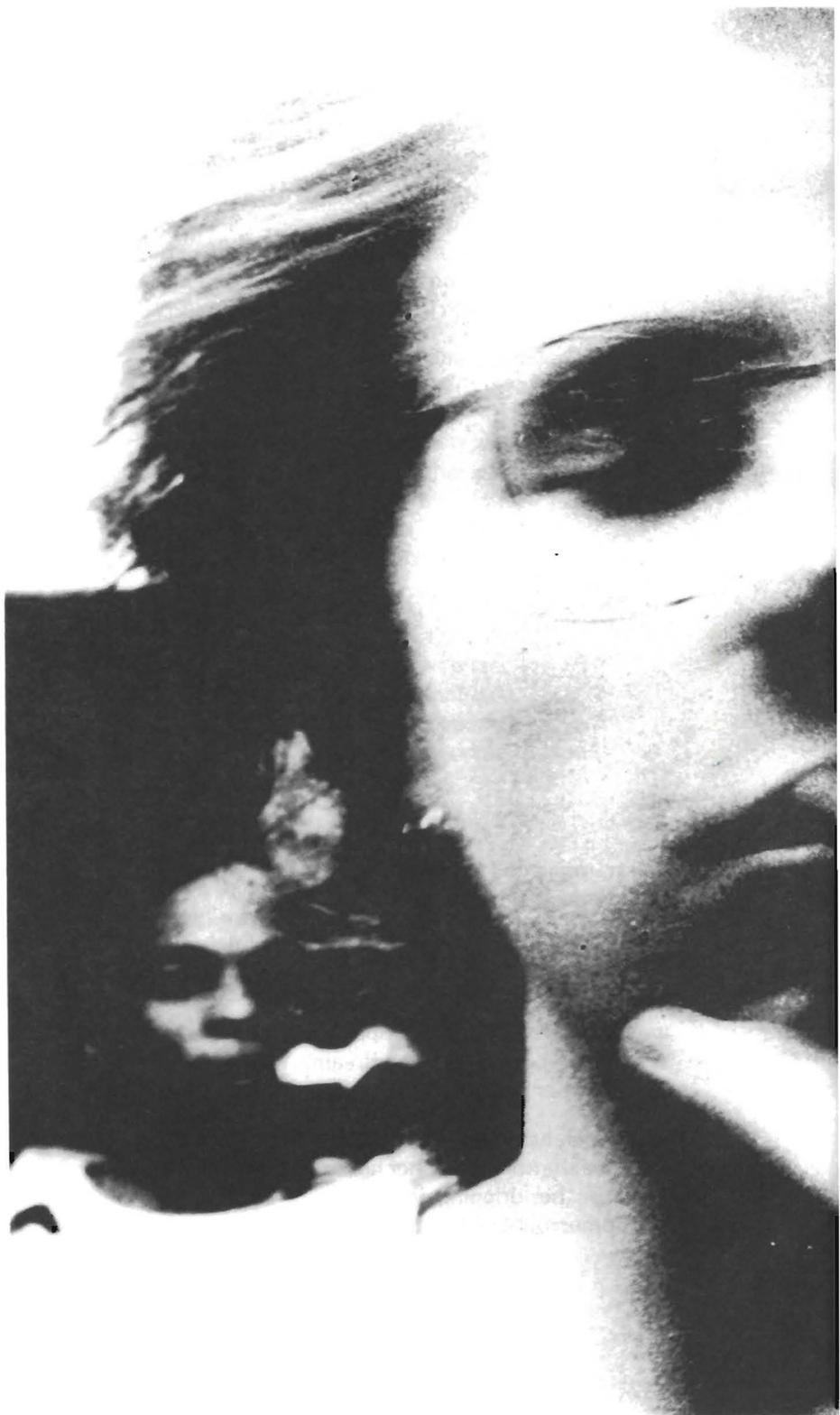
they pinch her spirit. Tears fall from her eyes
because she knows that her house contains her life,
her boys, her dripping dreams,
and tomorrow's coffee stains.

— Shannon Tuttle

27 AUGUST 1990

since the electricity was out this morning,
i wondered if hell froze over
if it did, then i could forget
that promise that i made to myself about you.

— *Juliana Post*





Todd Sebastian Williams

Spring Cleaning

by
Bethany Payne

Funny what you'll find when you start cleaning out the debris in your life. It was staring me in the face — my own face . . . my reflection in the mirror on the front of the medicine cabinet admonished me everyday.

"Tomorrow!" I would scowl at myself. But I was running out of room in the kitchen with the *new* medications, soaps, body lotions, make-up, zit removers and hair products I'd collected.

"Enough is enough. It's just a cabinet. Harmless. Absolutely nothing to fear."

You'd be amazed.

Taking a deep breath, I reached out, took hold of the mirror's edge, and pulled.

Junk spilled out everywhere. The bottle of ibuprofen that I'd been in too much pain to close tumbled and emptied its contents all over the sink, counter and floor. Seeing it made me think of my last period — the one I was so late for. The prayers I'd recited everyday, the struggle not to buy a home pregnancy test every time I passed the drugstore, and destruction of my fingernails came to mind.

Bending to pick up the pills and cram them into the bottle I remembered the rush of relief at the first cramps, followed by the annoyance at the bloating, headache, backache, and irritation that was so much worse than other months. But, "Better late than pregnant . . ." I'd muttered to myself in between mouthfuls of chocolate brownies, chocolate-covered marzipan, peanut butter and chocolate, and potato chips.

Laughing to myself, I started grabbing miscellaneous bottles of expired diet pills, cold tablets, vitamins, sticky half-empty hair-sprays, contact lens cleansers and crumbling tubes of toothpaste.

"So far so good." I feel pride at my accomplishment thus far — until. My hand retreats with the toothbrush in its grasp.

His.

And here I'd thought I'd cleaned the apartment of even the most inconsequential reminders of him. How the hell could I forget his stupid *toothbrush*?

Memories came flooding in: fighting like kids over space in the mirror as he shaved and I put on lipstick, flicking water at each other off toothbrushes, political discussions in the bathtub.

The "he" I refer to was the latest in a string of bad relationships. The "he" who could have been the fertilizer of the would-be child I feared before that last late period. *That* "he."

It'd been over before I counted the days in my pocket calendar and discovered my tardiness. I certainly couldn't have told him — I'd be damned if I'd let him think I was trying to con him back with a possible paternity suit.

So the question now is — what to do with the toothbrush? Throw it out or use it to polish my silver jewelry?

Concentrating on this new difficult decision in my life, I marched into the bedroom and headed straight for the closet. Flinging open the doors, I stood back and surveyed the terrain . . . bad fashion moves, crippling heels, and . . . clothes that distinctly said "Ex."

I began my inventory. Rifling through I extracted the rented but never returned tuxedo of the wanna-be movie star (Number Three), the torn workshirts of the Handyman (Number Two), the berkenstocks of Number One (ok, so he was a Dead-head from my college days) and the hideous dress I'd never worn — a gift from the latest (the Sculptor).

I was now a **Woman With A Mission**. Starting on the dresser drawers, I tore through, searching, boxers, men's bikini's, regular briefs, worn jeans much too large for me to have adopted, sweatpants, tie-dyes, and the hideously ugly plaid wool cap.

With mounting strength of conviction, I picked up my jewelry box and emptied its contents onto the vanity table — cufflinks and a broken belt-buckle.

To the hall closet now — bowling ball, single golf club, racquet ball glove.

“Guess I wasn't as thorough as I thought” races through my mind as I race to the kitchen.

Pushing aside the things that belong in the now empty bathroom medicine cabinet, I started tossing spice jars (I always hated the Handyman's tastes for cumin and paprika), a rusting container of slim-fast (the Actor was famous for developing my insecurity — “Darling, the Opening is in two days — couldn't you drop just five pounds??” — the herbal teas . . . (well, I guess I could keep these . . . My taste for the beverage began with the Deadhead and resurfaced with the sculptor. . . I'm actually rather fond of the stuff).

There, that just about . . . the records! Off I go to the stereo compartment — out with Johnny Mathis, the New Age, and Metallica (all from the Handyman, believe it or not).

I drag all of this clutter into the kitchen, open the oven door, grab lighter fluid, strike the match, and **WHOOSH!**

I've singed my bangs and eyelashes — but everything is going up in smoke or melting into a puddle.

I sit back on my ankles, watching the flames, and feel an aching in the fingers of my right hand — I am still clutching the toothbrush . . . I toss it on top of the pyre.

I hum a satisfied tune. Doubtless my landlord is calling the police. Someone's banging on the door. The place is pretty much trashed. But, for the first time in years, I feel really clean.



The Fire

The smoke rises into the air; the blackened bark floats lazily upward.
I smell the pines, and I feel sadness.
Memories of the past have touched me, but I have forgotten them.

A log is added to the flames; the sparks fly higher and the heat grows more intense.

I feel the warmth of the fire and I shiver with sudden chills.

The wood has set free a shower of sparks; a sudden crunch and it rains upward.

I watch the sparks rise over the flames; they are powered by the heat of the wood. The tiny dots of light spiral into the darkness; each one representing a soul.

The voices of the departing ones could be heard; softly coming from within the fireplace. The firewood hissed and popped and sounded like a faint whispering.

I try to speak to one of the lonely voices, but my voice fails.

So, I sit surrounded by hundreds of tiny voices, and remain in silence.

The heat of the fire warms me; I am bathed in the power of the flames.

I know what this fire is; it is the world.

But this heat, this warmth of the flames that threatens to consume me, what is it?

I say goodbye to the souls that fly away; they echo back their cries, leaving a trail of wood scented memories behind and I sit alone and sad.

When every last ember has turned grey and cold I still have not found the answer to my question.

— *Sidian*

Marble Dreams

No flashbulbs, please.

A sculptor's warped vision
finding the grains of rock,
sleeping on a slate bed of marble,
dreaming of fondling a famous bust.

— *Marc McGee*

Wind

Seagulls whipping
over the trees, tumbling
and spinning
in the torrent
of wind,
a black crow sailing
behind them.

— *Timothy Senft*



Caramia Donovan

Motel Maid

The bed in room three
Is happily rumpled,
Covered with a careless top sheet and spread,
An attempt to conceal the evidence
Of a blissful romp of intimacy.
I smile and dream.

The bed in room five
Is a veteran of war wounds.
A pounded wedge of pillows
Leans against the headboard in exhaustion.
The pillow cases are damp with sweat.
One has a ripped open seam.
The bed lies like a half naked survivor
Trying to heal.
Sheets and blanket are trampled on the floor.
Pain clings to the mattress.
Nightmares scream out of the hollows.
I wheel in my cart.
The clean linen looks like stacks of sterile bandages.

The bed in room ten has been stripped.
The death sheets are swallowed by a pillow case
Propped up near the door.
The mattress,
Stained with traces of a life that ceased,
Exudes the smells of decay.
I open the door and windows
To let in the sun-fresh air.

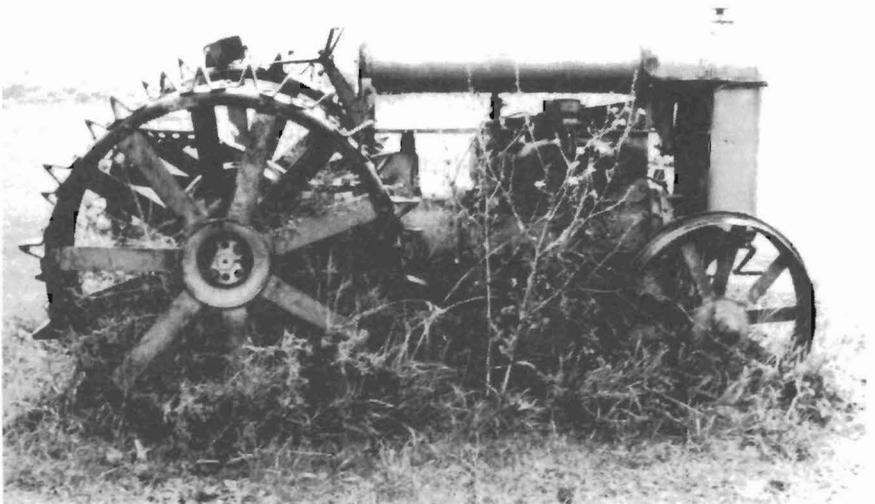
The bed in room twenty
Is as full as a pregnant cat.
Half hidden within the hills and valleys of blanket
Are storybooks and crayons,
A teddy bear,
And two curled up children.
There is the sweet sour smell of urine and cookies.
A woman raises her head,
Puts her finger to her lips
As I smile and quietly close the door.

— *Beverlee Salley*

Wind

Seagulls whipping
over the trees, tumbling
and spinning
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— Beverlee Salley



Caramia Donovan

A SUMMER STORY

by
Anthony Galbraith

Jessica found a diamond in farmer Cromby's cornfield. She held the object in her palm, her nose nearly touching it. Her blue eyes were wide in absolute amazement. Her mouth hung open as though she wanted to say something, but no words came out.

"It is beautiful," she finally breathed.

She tilted her palm and marveled at the way the thing constantly sparkled; no matter where the sun shined, the diamond always glistened. Then, the sun broke through the tall cornstalks around her and struck the jewel, setting free a multitude of tiny beams of light to dance on the green leaves and into her eyes. She closed her eyes and tried to blink away the spots of light that burned in her head. Opening her eyes she moved her hand and saw the diamond resting, peacefully, in her hand, sparkling, but not as brightly as before.

She began to wonder where such a beautiful thing had come from. She looked around her, in the dirt and among the shadows of the cornstalks for more, but she didn't see any others. Jessica looked into the sky. The small, high clouds above looked like horses' tails. Could the diamond have fallen out of the sky? She asked herself. Shrugging her shoulders, she looked back down at the diamond.

"Where did this come from?" she asked. She questioned the tall cornstalks around her, the dirt beneath her feet, the clouds above her head. "Maybe the diamond fell from a ring. A ring worn by farmer Cromby as he plowed his field," she said, imagining the diamond falling from the ring and the freshly turned soil below. "He probably doesn't even know it's missing."

Jessica looked again at the diamond, then at her hand. She tried to visualize the diamond set in a ring. Too big! The diamond would never fit on a ring. She thought. This diamond could fit in a crown.

"This is a diamond from a crown!" she said suddenly. Jessica began to walk in a small circle and tried to think of who would wear a crown. "A queen," she said. "A queen that came to inspect the corn after it has been plowed. She came one day to check the field and the diamond fell from her crown, unnoticed," she said, finishing with a sigh. "I have a queen's diamond!" she said to the crow that flew overhead.

The crow replied with a loud, "caw!"

"It must be worth a fortune!" she said. She stared at the diamond and tried to imagine what she could buy with it. She had to decide what she would buy with the diamond.

It didn't take long for her to make up her mind. She had always dreamed of owning a castle. "I will buy a castle and I will be a princess!" she cried. "I will be rich and will follow behind the queen as she inspects the field." Jessica smiled and walked in a circle between the cornstalks. She pulled leaves from the stalks and began to weave them into bows and braids. She sang songs to the birds that flew overhead and to the crickets that chirped beside her. By the time the sun had moved from the overhead, she had made a small pile of corn leaf bows and braids. She weaved the braids into her fine blonde hair and attached the bows to her dress.

She then broke over some cornstalks and made a small clearing in the field. She threw the broken stalks over her and let them rest across the tall cornstalks that remained planted in the ground, making a roof.

Jessica began to dance and sing in the shade of her unsteady hut. She held the diamond in her hand as though it were an egg. With her head held high, she walked with a straight back and her eyes closed. She acted proper. She was a princess.

Her moment of joy was soon interrupted by urgent shouts and the loud sound of cornstalks being trampled.

"Jessica! Where are you?" shouted her brother. "Hide 'n Seek is over now, okay!"

Jessica stopped singing and stood still. She held the diamond in her hand and hid it behind her back. The trampling grew louder.

"Jessica! Come on!" he screamed. "Oh! There you are," he said, jumping slightly as he came into her shaded area. Her brother stood before her, the tall cornstalks that grew around him made him seem even shorter than he already was. "What is that in your hair?"

"Braids," she said.

"Looks like weeds to me."

"I have bows, too," she said, turning slightly to show them hanging from her dress.

"They look boring. I don't like bows," he said looking around him. "Did you make this hut?"

"Yes." Jessica noticed that he was staring at her, suspiciously. She took a step back.

"What do you got there?" he asked sweetly.

"Nothing," she said quickly, taking another step back.

"Come on, let me see! Is it a frog! A snake?"

"No, it's nothing." Jessica feared that if her brother saw the diamond, he would take it and then he would be rich. But she knew that if he had the diamond, he would use it to buy such foolish things as candy or toys. He reached around her to grab her arm, but she pulled her arm away.

"Then let me see!" he said.

"No."

"Please?" he said. Her brother reached out and pulled her arm sharply and she felt the diamond fly from her hand.

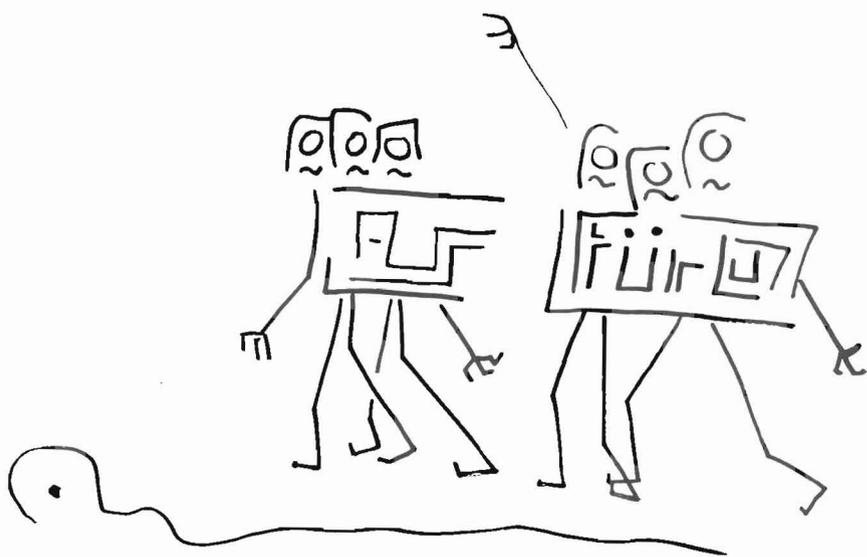
"NO! Kevin!" she cried. The diamond fell slowly downward. Jessica reached out to catch it, but didn't move fast enough. The diamond hit a rock and shattered into hundreds of tiny splinters, spreading over the dirt and among the cornstalks. "My diamond!" she screamed.

"Diamond?" said Kevin. "That's not a diamond, it's just a piece of glass."

10-2-89

red eleven shoe makers or the ginger spirit
the twelve
pack authors/theives
chose to convene
on a nacht
made suitable
as the zwolf
moons took
to the skaie
& under their
portmanteau
they wore
incandescent
vessels &
poured vin
to goblets of
marble — so
we were forced
to invent
straws to
suck the liquid
down our
mouths loved
the straws &
the invention
was stolen
on that
sabbath

— *Juliana Post*



March of the Babbling Idiots

Todd Sebastian Williams

It's Cold

That duck has frostbite!

“But its got a down coat.”

Didn't anyone tell you

Not to put it in the dryer?

“No, the tag was missing.”

Oh.

— Steve Leeds

“Here lies one whose name was writ in water”

— title taken from the tombstone of John Keats

Will you lay with me on the shore of a forbidden cove
until the sea baptizes us with her salty sermon?

I want to worship before the altar of Atlantis
and sacrifice something precious just for you.

These waves have licked the secrets of the deepest Asian ocean.

Watch them roll in revelry against the senseless sand.

The tides soothing rhythm bathes the shore with sacred song,
but the shore hears only lifeless lyrics
from the desperate drone of driftwood.

Let's climb upon the back of some Leviathan
and drown reality in the depths of our dreams.

Below us lay the ships which sailed their crews
into the sweet cradle of immortal slumber.

perhaps there waits a conch-carved grave for me which states:
“Here lies one whose name was writ in water.”

I've grown tired of this thirsty desert caravan
which moves in circles around mortal mirages.

This sand stings my face like countless contradictions.

I need something which will cleanse my eyes of doubt,
and pull me deep beneath the surface of my soul.

Will you lay with me on the shore of a forbidden cove
until the sea baptizes us with her salty sermon?

I want to worship before the altar of Atlantis
and sacrifice something precious just for you.

— Tom Fugalli

Lento

There plays none but silent music
while we kiss

Full quiet shrouds my ear,
and all my thought is still.

Each note of breath
with yours entwines,
along with heartbeats rhythm.

Enfolding you within my clasp
my touch ascends the scale,
our senses full

in equal measures,
the echoes fall in counterpoint

— Nat Siembor

1:37 A.M. Bus Station, Syracuse

The late night hum of vending machines
Is zum-zumming through my eyes.
The yucky yells of "Drunk Tonight!"
Do "bump and bang" my "now and when."
A sweet brown coffee bubbles burg in belly
And strange eruptions groad their groan in tune.
An itch of flat end butt and hollow mouth
Do gnaw away at bone and teeth,
And sudden bursts from mouth and butt
Keep humming eyes up wide,
The beepy burp of joystick peeps
Singe the silent slumps in T.V. seats.
And all I smell is long and slow
At the station still, reflecting.

J. A. Carle

Her pen cap was so chewed up, she had to brush the plastic off her teeth at the end of the day. The flesh of her tongue was even partially scraped because there were times she couldn't find anything else to bite on. She had no cuticles, they were replaced with dried blood at the end of each finger nail. The poor girl had even managed to pluck out all of her eyebrows with her fingers.

She couldn't stand still when spoken to. She had to rotate around the person with her hands clasped behind her back. She also had a ritualistic walk to class that had everybody on campus walk by her with a prayer, even if they weren't religious. She would take four steps forward, two backward, then one forward. It's the same walk Jeffrey Dahmer had when he walked to his bus stop in grade school.

— *Tania Gad*



“Why you’ll take no more lovers”

You entered with steaming confidence
You left with a hollowed heart
You came home silent and numbed

You scrubbed for hours on end it seemed
But you couldn’t get the smell
of last night’s lover
out from under your fingernails.

— *Garrett Wagner*



Liquid Diet

I’m on a
Liquid diet.
All I drink
Is Coca-Cola.

Machines are
So convenient,
So I have
A can for breakfast.

I chug at
Lunch and dinner,
Though I know
It makes me sick. So

If I say
That I can’t stop
Does that make
Me a Coke addict?

— *Mortiche*



My Best Buddy

Renee Page

Rhyme of a Witch's Child

It happened one sweltersome summer.
She cursed a girl with an itch.
This horrible malison,
(The victim was Alison,)
She learned from her mother, the witch.

She nabbed an ugsome mouser
"This cat is really *my sis!*
Eldfather knows
She'll turn you to *toads!*
His daughter's my mother, the witch!"

As she was allergic to fleas,
She snot her nose and then scritchd
"DON'T MAKE FUN OF MY SNEEZE,
'CAUSE MY AUNTS ARE BANSHEES
AND ALSO MY MOMMY'S A WITCH!"

'Cause of her wanchance we snickered.
"We know," I said, "Your mom's a witch,"
You're in the slodder,
And Wolfman's your father,
But that just makes you a bitch!"

— *Mortiche*

The Song of the Mad Maze

I saw a quean one day
While I was eating some peas.
She grabbed and hit me
Until I could see
The dunts between my knees!

A dumble, old man
Saw me scream with pain,
So he just sneered
And sneered and fleered
Until I went insane!

A gowk of a man with a knevel
Saw me receive the blows,
So he punched me and beat me
Until I could see
All the hair under his nose!

Now, I was crying with a stound
When an ugsome woman came.
She touched me and scared me
Until I could see
The woman as a pretty dame!

A young gonsel came
To avert the people's gaze.
I saw them swive;
The sex was alive.
I ran from the crazy maze!

— *Adam Altman*



Waiting Room

The man entered the psychiatric clinic
And sat down
Holding his palms together between his rocking knees.
The doctor appeared and said,
“You just relax awhile;
We’re going to discuss a few things first
And then we’ll call you in.”
The man turned up passive eyes and said,
“What am I, a guinea pig?”
The doctor chuckled and turned away.

I’ve seen an animal research lab.
There was a dog with an extra head sewed on.
Four passive dog eyes blinking.
What am I, a guinea pig?
The doctor patted him and turned away.

My neighbor, on welfare,
Was hospitalized for a vaginal infection.
A woman doctor
Brought in a flock of male interns,
Insisting on a group examination.
“What am I, a guinea pig?”
“Cooperate! It’s for your own good,”
Said the doctor.
“Give me some credit for brains!” said
My not-so-passive neighbor.
The interns coughed and shifted from foot to foot.
One chuckled and turned away.

I spent the day around lobotomy patients.
I saw disconnected anger in those passive eyes.
One woman touched me repeatedly saying,
“Awww, the baby. Awww, the baby.”
The therapist chuckled and turned away.

The man entered the psychiatric clinic
And sat down
Holding his palms between his rocking knees.
The doctor appeared and said,
“You just relax awhile;
We’re going to discuss a few things first
And then we’ll call you in.”

— *Beverlee Salley*

Word-play

We meet over a bottle of white wine
and a softcover of Harlequin,
alternating: now you read and I
shall sip, ravishing the place where
once your lips touched. We'll switch off
every chapter sharing book and
goblet alike. Whoops! Don't read
too much, you might get sick!
We'll finish off and
begin where the book and Blue Nun left off.
I am dizzy with you (or
mayhaps the wine) as we mirthfully,
prancing, dance around each
other, minds entwined in foreword.
We penetrate further
into discourse, working
each other to and fro
in *coitus mentalis*,
finally reaching the climax . . .
and all that is left afterward
is afterword, a verbal
let
down.

— Justin Goltermann

Just a Moment

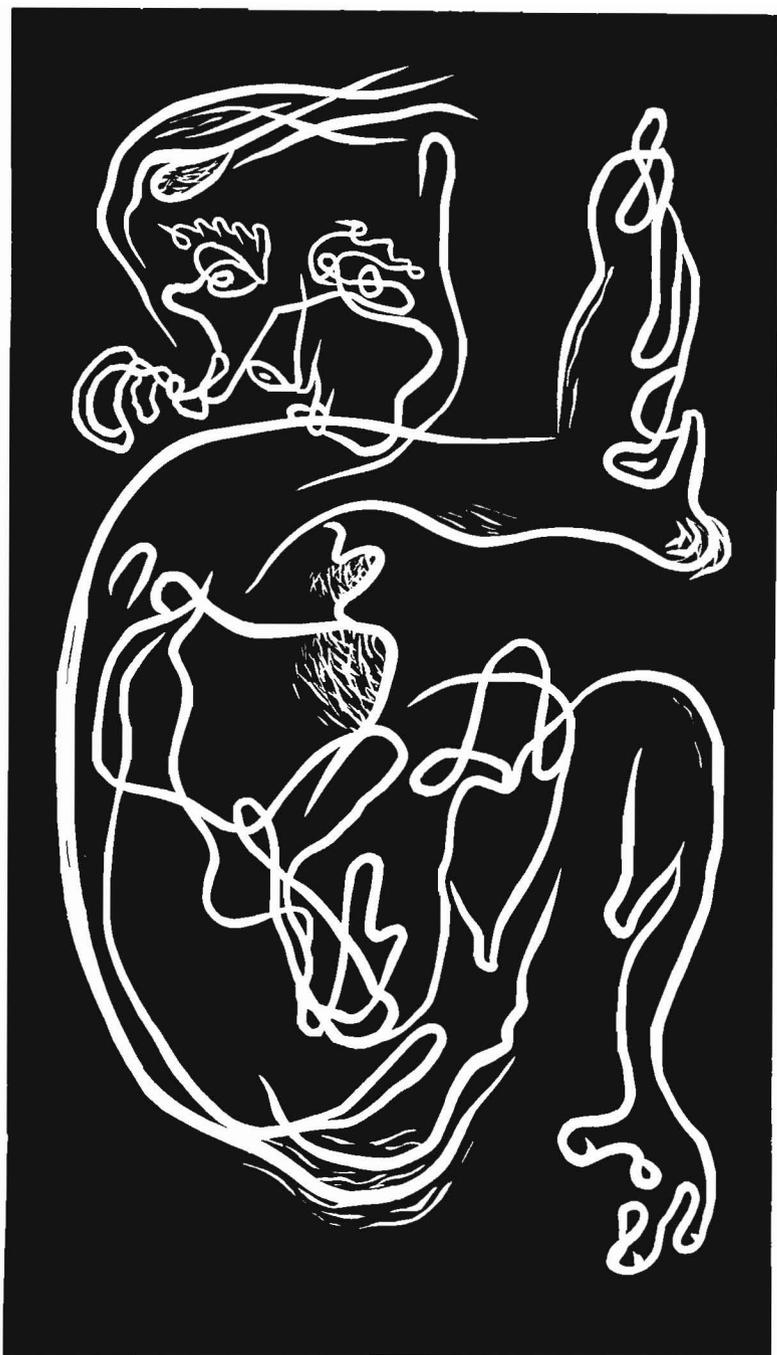
She just looked at me
that was all it was.
Just a moment,
Only a glance.
That was all I really needed
or wanted
from
her.

— Michael Martin

She Worried

She worried and worried
and worried and worried
about everyone and anyone
about everything and nothing
about little things and big things
 until it gnawed at her mind
 and her heart and soul
 and conscience and
 bones and crushed and
broke down her whole being
 into nothing but worries
splattered all over her grave.

— *Denise Shapiro*



J. A. Carle

I Slept with an Indian and Awoke in a Bleeding Fire

A bronze woman clad in leather
and adorned with wooden beads
led me to the banks of eternity.
A canoe drifted towards us through the fog
like the slow recollection of a dream.
I climbed inside its cradled embrace
and watched the rocking hips of the woman
as she steered us with slender arcs of her shoulders.

The canoe glided upon the shore of Paradise
and the woman softly wrapped herself around me.
I was soon lost in the scent of her skin
and the natural nectar on her lips.
All our senses moved in rhythm of the river
until the canoe was enticed from the shore
by the caress of the currents.

The quiet pulse of the river
rolled waves of sleep across my eyes
and the fog danced into shapes of slumber.
I saw vast fertile plains,
seas of mighty buffalo
and painted profiles framed in feathers.
Then suddenly a war-cry
pierced the silence like an arrow.

The canoe had turned into a coffin
and above us was the mouldering mouth
of an open grave.
The last thing I remember was emerging
into the smoke of a burning Indian village.
I saw entire families framed in the flames
of a single bleeding fire.

I jolted up before the hissing screen
with beads of guilt running down my pale face.
I tried to sleep but my conscience kept me awake
like a drum repeating a single question:
Is this a personal nightmare of the American Dream?

— Tom Fugalli