


Spring 2002

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ET CETERA

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY'S LITERARY MAGAZINE



SPRING 2002

2002 Prize Winners

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2ND PLACE FICTION: Chris Hughes

1ST PLACE POETRY: Sarabeth Mills

2ND PLACE POETRY: Lisa Robinson

1ST PLACE ART: Makiko Sasanuma

2ND PLACE ART: Jeff Gentner

ET CETERA

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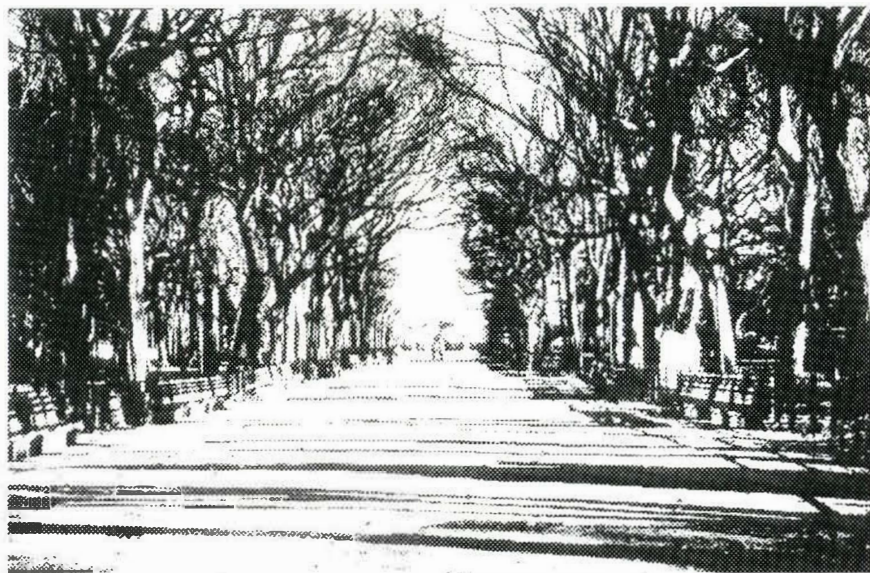
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cover art by Makiko Sasanuma

front cover: *Once, I Was Not Alone* (first place art)

back cover: *See What I See?*

SECOND PLACE ART



The Mall (Central Park NYC)

JEFF GENTNER

SECOND PLACE FICTION

The Fall

CHRIS HUGHES

The good thing about being 12 years old is that you're old enough to know better, but still young enough so that everybody thinks you don't. During the summer of 1985, I used up every bit of the 'not knowing better' excuse I had left, and then some. To be fair, other than my friend almost dying, my awkward introduction to love, the initial workings of dishonesty and deceit showing throughout my neighborhood, my first foray into theft, getting shot at twice, and a lengthy, infuriating quest for pornography, the summer went pretty well for me. And like most episodes of enormous consequence, the whole summer was set in motion by one tiny incident. The bottle of champagne on the masthead of that season seemed inconsequential at the time. But the whole chain of events that spanned from April to October of that year, and, truthfully, the rest of my life, was born from that one single act. Something that in another time, on another night, in another place, would've made no difference at all. Nothing extravagant or ominous, but a simple, soft, essential...one stubborn roll of toilet paper.

On this Friday night in mid-April, I was readying myself to leave a barrage of toilet paper in the trees of the Protsam twins, the most despicable of the goody-goodies at Grover Cleveland Junior High. The most despicable to me and my friends, anyway. The Protsam twins never did anything out of the ordinary that would warrant having their house decorated in Charmin. Candace, who was 13 and three and a half minutes older than Abigail, wore her hair short and her glasses low on her nose, giving her a menacing, school librarian's glare. Abigail's hair was lighter and longer, and her glasses stayed pressed close to her face and magnified her glowing green eyes, making her look constantly astonished. It was a well-known fact that both girls were busty for their age, or any age, for that matter, something all the boys in the neighborhood had noticed and secretly admired. However, it was never, ever discussed at length, for the Protsam twins—impressive bra size or no—were the enemy. Their crimes were simple but serious: They lived only a few blocks away in our tiny sub-division of Forest Meadows. They were in the junior high band, and they enjoyed it. They read books! In their spare time, no less, and ones not published by Marvel or DC! Their most vile act, though, was that they were girls and we were boys, and history has shown that even more conflicting than dogs and cats, fire and rain, Autobots and Decepticons—boys and girls make the most worthy natural enemies. To a group of 11 and 12 years olds, those things alone were treacherous, and more than enough reason to deliver an all-out toilet paper assault.

There were only three of us that night—me, Petey, and Scat. Dressing for these late night excursions was as deliberate and precise as a doctor preparing for surgery. The darkest shoes we owned were laced tight and tied tighter, over dark socks—sports socks, dress socks, wool socks, it didn't matter, as long as they weren't white. Sweatpants, sweatshirts, gloves, if we had them dark enough, were all checked and double-checked for flexibility, comfort, and secrecy. I often wished they made a color darker than black just so we would be as near to invisible as was scientifically possible, gliding through the shadows, behind trees, in between houses whose inhabitants slept calmly inside. I envisioned more important acts of secrecy as I slid into my ink black sweats...this was preparation for a surveillance mission, spying on the king of Spain, and his lover, both of whom were to soon be assassinated lest I heroically intervene... or perhaps the Louvre's security was to be made a joke of, as I crept over the rooftop and through the ventilation ducts before lowering myself from the ceiling and clutching in my hands the Mona Lisa, which would soon take its place on my wall beside my Purple Rain poster. I could see the headlines in my mind: Local Youth Gus Preston Confesses to Theft of Mona Lisa—Note of Admission Found With Painting; Thief Still At Large. Those adventures had to wait, though, as we had toilet paper to launch, and soon, I had to meet Petey and Scat in 7 minutes and forty three seconds, according to my watch, which had been set in synch with theirs earlier in the day. My room was in the basement, on the same floor as a bathroom, laundry room, and a door leading to the garage. Of course, it would've been worlds easier to walk into the garage, open the garage door, and escape that way. But I feared that the awkward click... click... clicking of the door being raised would wake up and alert not only my parents and close neighbors, but also the local police and several regional SWAT teams as well. Without making a sound, I crept slowly from my bedroom window and out into the darkness, toward the awaiting adventure.

Petey had the luxury of having his room on the ground floor of his house as well, but with access to a door whose hinges were oiled often, especially the day of a mission, and which was far enough away from his parents' room not to cause concern. We were never sure how Scat got out of his house, as his room was on the second floor and was right beside his parents'. If anyone was nervous about getting caught, it was Scat, who flinched at the first sign of a car headlight or a barking dog but nonetheless took his TPing tasks very seriously. He would never tell us how he managed to get out of his house without being detected, and we never pushed the issue... there was a part of us that didn't want to know too much. We met at the normal, predetermined time—1 AM sharp. Petey had defied our mission agenda and apparently gotten there a few minutes early, which was good in a way since he was able to do a quick survey of the surroundings. The Protsam home, a one-story, ranch style house, was totally dark and silent, and all the Protsam automobiles were accounted for, thus ruling out a surprise, late night

return home. The toilet paper—a twelve pack—was opened, and Scat quickly tucked the wrapper into his pocket. “Can’t be leaving evidence,” he declared, thinking perhaps the Protsams would assume, since no wrapper was found among the carnage, that the toilet paper had been the first wave of an air attack from the Russians, with an onslaught of nuclear missiles to follow soon. The rolls were quickly distributed, four each, into our waiting and anxious hands. We shared a grave look before nodding and beginning the attack.

The toilet paper shot like fireworks into the sky and trickled through the embracing limbs of the Protsams’ trees. We had long ago mastered the art of effective TP tossing—the flowing tail left behind the roll, the high arch, the quick snap of the wrist at release—and thus these exercises ran smoothly and controlled. After a few early missions, we’d realized that the empty tube, previously discarded after it was bare of paper, could actually be used to decorate car antennas, lampposts, or even doorknobs. It was Scat who first came up with the Empty-Tube-As-Accessory maneuver, a procedure for which we lauded him as a revolutionary genius. He had since done some fantastic work with empty tubes, once in a mail slot, once as an extension of the exhaust pipe on the Parker family’s van, another time as sheaths to a dozen low-lying tree limbs. Scat’s masterpiece was a 12-roll construction of a little man standing in the yard, something he’d admitted he had plotted and diagrammed for weeks prior to that specific raid. Sadly, it was his last creation of the sort, as soon thereafter he began seriously worrying about the possibility of fingerprints being lifted from the tubes and sent to crime labs around the country. He had since started pocketing the rolls, taking them home, and burning them in case the police showed up with warrants.

I tried not to get emotional, but there was always a beauty to seeing toilet paper stream through the darkened sky. Each outing, I would pause to watch, if only for a second. Scat was very calculated but nervous, getting the job done quickly but confidently, never rushing, but always with an eye on the road for possible cars entering the area, of which he was always the first to notice. Petey always seemed to have the most fun of us all when we were out on our raids. He was determined and inventive, often times finding just the right place in a yard to stand so he could get the angle he needed on a throw. He had a method to his tomfoolery.

The first roll, to Petey, was the introductory roll, like the opening act of a concert. It let him feel things out, see which trees grasped the paper best, how hard he needed to toss the roll to get it to arch and fall smoothly through the trees—a warm-up roll. The second roll was his favorite by far. He was ready. He had a feel for which trees wanted his toilet paper, and which would turn it away. He knew how high to throw, and the specific arm muscles needed for tossing toilet paper were warmed up and itching for action. The third roll was what Petey called the Ground Roll. The Ground Roll’s single purpose was to stay below the

trees—scattered in bushes, swirling around lamp posts, stuffed in mailboxes, wrapped around cars, tied from a door's knocker to its knob—anything at or below eye level was open game for The Ground Roll. The fourth roll was bitter-sweet. Like the last of any good thing—candy, firecrackers, Doritos—you're grateful for it, but boy, do you wish you could start all over. Ah, the fourth roll... you stand there in guilty shock with the feeling of "What!? Done already!? But I just started!" and yet there's nothing you can do. After the initial sinking feeling, you can use roll four to accent anything that worked particularly well with rolls 1-3; perhaps a bush needs touching up, maybe a strand in a tree would look even better if crisscrossed with another.

Petey's first roll had not even touched the ground after his last toss when he hurried back to the curb to get his second. The toilet paper always sat away from the victims' house a bit and in our direct line of escape—in case a light in the house came on or a suspicious noise was heard and the mission were aborted, there was a chance someone, in a moment of unselfishness, would be able to scoop up the unused ammo as they fled, to be used to TP another day. Petey held his second roll and struck the majestic but ridiculously forced phony pose of an old-time quarterback, the way you'd see Johnny Unitas posing proudly on one of his football cards. His left arm was extended and stiff with his palm facing out, his right arm cocked, hand behind head, gripping the toilet paper, ready to throw.

"Joe Montana," he whispered. Then he heaved a Hail Mary pass toward the arms of the Protsam's gigantic oak tree.

A couple of things happened at that point that would have been seen as clearly foreboding had we been in any other mind but a mischievous one. First, the roll didn't unfurl as it should have, instead clinging tightly to its roll. Secondly, and most amazingly, the roll managed to fly cleanly through the hundreds of branches of the tree—a feat none of us could've ever, in our lives, done on purpose. It was the kind of thing they give away the big prizes for at carnivals. "Step right up, test your aim! All ya gotta do is toss this roll of single ply toilet paper up and through the heart of that tree WITHOUT hitting any of the branches, and you can win yourself this life-sized stuffed elephant! Give it a whirl! Three tries for a dollar!" It was an incredible feat, one I would rank with the Northern Lights, the construction of the pyramids and Dolly Parton's boobs as phenomena whose origins leave me absolutely befuddled. The roll sailed through the thick web of branches and landed with a muted THUD on the roof before rolling awkwardly to a rest against the chimney.

Maybe if it'd been Petey's third or fourth roll, things would not have happened as they did. But it was his second, and, well, to Petey, that just wasn't going to stand. Petey stood, solemnly, defeated. He stared at the unused toilet paper roll there on the roof of 127 Duerson Court. His number two roll... his second in command... the one with which he was to have the most fun, done the most damage, painted the broadest stroke on his masterpiece of prank. But there

he stood, still, as the roll rested, still, in plain sight but without a hint of falling to the ground. It was not going to come down on its own.

Thinking little of it, other than to offer a teasing smirk at Petey's expense, I went back to tossing my toilet paper. Scat, I noticed, had not seen any of Petey's misfortune, instead letting his eyes dart back and forth from the street to an ornate design of paper he'd started working on in the bushes. As I finished my first roll and went for my second, I noticed Petey, still standing in the yard, gazing longingly to the roof.

"What are you doing?" I whispered, initially worrying he'd been caught and was locked in panic as a potential captor stared him down. I quickly learned this wasn't the case.

"I'm gonna go after it," he said, jaw thrust forward and nostrils flared.

"What? On the roof? No...." But I knew already that he couldn't be talked down. One way or another, the evening was going to end with Petey having been on the roof of the Protsam home.

"Well I was thinking," Petey said. "A dozen rolls is like \$3.99. That's about 35 cents a roll. If there were 35 cents up there, you'd go after it." Petey had picked a very inopportune time to become a penny-pinching Scrooge.

"No..." I said. "I wouldn't. I wouldn't climb onto someone's roof at one in the morning for 35 cents, or for 35 cents worth of paper. Just finish what you have and—"

"Cover me," Petey said.

Admittedly, I wanted nothing more than to see Petey up on that roof. A small part of me, what I assumed was my conscience speaking up for the first time in my life, told me I should under no circumstances let him get up there... it was too risky, too dangerous... he could get hurt, for heaven's sake! But that voice was quickly drowned out by the roar of immaturity: "YES! He's actually gonna do it! Encourage him! Give him a boost, if he needs it! Three cheers for Petey's ascent to the roof! Hip hip, hooray!" So I tried, halfheartedly, to tell him not to, and I gladly failed. I knew seeing Petey on that roof retrieving a roll of Charmin's cheapest would be something we'd talk about for years to come.

The Protsam's one story home was bookended by two large trees, one at each corner of the house. The branches of the towering oak on the right side of the house stretched high enough and stayed thick over the roof so that a person could, were he skilled enough in the art of tree climbing, scale the tree and gain access to the roof. We knew this from years of watching Mr. Protsam take that same route to the roof when putting up Christmas lights.

Petey was slightly chubby—not fat by any means, but not skinny—a kid who liked his chocolate, liked his naps, but loathed exercise, unless it was for the purpose of some manner of debauchery, in which case he had the energy of an Olympic decathlete. One of Petey's notable talents was his ability to climb a tree with the grace of a squirrel, and before long, he had maneuvered up, through and

around the branches and was creeping softly across the Protsam's roof. Fortunately, all the bedrooms were toward the back of the house, away from where Petey was skulking.

The sight of Petey on the roof sent a bit of a chill through me. It was a feeling of impending panic, a realization that if ever there were a bad time to get spotted, it would be right now, with Petey on the roof of a house whose yard we were vandalizing with toilet paper. I looked to Scat to see if he shared my fear, but he had not even noticed Petey's rise to the roof. He was still carefully stringing his toilet paper in a zigzag pattern across the bushes on the other side of the yard.

When I glanced back up to Petey, he was holding a branch that he must have broken off the tree. He was looking out into the yard, holding the branch like a guitar. When he was sure I was watching, he began to perform a rollicking bit of air guitar— an instrument Petey was very adept at playing. He could mimic almost every Top 40 radio hit on air guitar, although sometimes he mistook synthesizers for guitars, but we overlooked that in the face of his awe-inspiring mastery of an invisible instrument. He peered out and across the street to his thousands of imagined fans, pointing to them, nodding affectionately, belting out killer, silent riffs. When his solo seemed over—or he got bored, I wasn't sure—he began creeping toward his lost roll, which was now a few mere feet away.

"Hurry up," I whisper-shouted. I was admittedly becoming nervous. He held up his index finger in the universal 'just a second' signal. Suddenly, he looked down, then crouched and began working at something near his feet. At first, I thought he was trying to tie his shoe—fancy place to do something like that, I thought. Time was of the essence, and while stopping to tie his shoe may've seemed like a good idea at the time (safety on rooftops made a little bit of sense, even to me), it wasn't as important as playing air guitar or retrieving missing toilet tissue. But the more he kept fidgeting, I realized he wasn't tying his shoe at all. He was, as best as I could tell, ... then Petey's hand shot up in what I instantly recognized as a pose of victory. In his hand he clenched a small square roofing shingle, jimmied free of its natural place on the Protsams' roof. He held his prize only a moment before flinging it, Frisbee style, out into the darkness, across the street, where it curved into Old Man Fogerty's yard and stuck point-down in the dirt.

I winced when I saw the glaring imperfection he'd caused by removing the tile. The Protsam's roof was shingled in light gray, and where Petey had stripped the tile was a blackened square that stood out like a shadowy cave on an ashen cliff wall.

The sight caused a sick feeling to fester in my stomach. Petey had violated an unspoken rule about our late night excursions: he had caused Permanent Damage. Toilet paper, as messy as it was (especially if a rain came after the TPing and before the clean-up, creating a rare but wonderful and maddening mess), could be cleaned up with a rake, maybe a ladder, or a really long stick to

reach into the trees. Occasionally, if you had a strong arm and a little luck, you could get a stream to reach and tangle high enough into a tall tree that only an army attack helicopter, equipped with lasers and the jaws of life, could recover it. Tyler Bingham, an older kid in the neighborhood and the ace pitcher for the high school team, once told of a swatch of toilet paper he threw that stayed in a tree for a year and a half! Through rain, windstorms, snow, sun, even birds looking for nesting supplies, somehow, the toilet paper remained. He said he could only assume that when it did leave the tree, it was through divine intervention. That, of course, was a rare case, as a good toilet paper mess only lasted a week or so, tops. But what Petey had done that night was more than a simple practical joke. He had caused damage that would require a new shingle, thus violating the tarnish-but-don't-destroy credo we had up until now gone by. The bad karma caught up with him almost instantly.

After what seemed like way too much time to be on someone's roof in the dead of night, Petey finally picked up his errant toilet paper roll. I had assumed he would at least give one toss from the roof into the tree, which would've been a great idea since he would have gotten about ten feet of additional height by launching from the rooftop.

He looked at the branch in his hand, then at the roll of paper in his other. He sized them up, glanced into the distance, and then stood in a near-batting stance. Baseball season was in full swing now, and Petey was in his first year of Babe Ruth after a stellar Little League career as third baseman for the Delby's Fish Market team. He had baseball on the brain, whether he was on the field or on a roof. I had always heard that during a car wreck or some equally traumatic event, everything slowed down. I was experiencing that sensation for the first time as I watched Petey's rooftop at-bat.

His eyes locked on the white roll resting in his hand. They stayed fixed on it as he tossed the paper into the air, after which his left arm shot back and clenched the branch, and he quickly went into his batting stance, which he had modeled perfectly after Mike Schmidt—back elbow low, front arm high, chin resting on shoulder, left leg locked straight, right leg back. His face clenched into a tense flex of determination as he mustered every available ounce of strength and baseball talent and focused them on the falling cylinder of paper in front of him. His hands drove the branch forward, hard... and with a powerful WHOOSH, he missed the roll entirely.

I assumed Scat had by now noticed what was going on and turned to him to share my laughter, but he was still methodically grooming the toilet paper on the bushes across the yard, oblivious to the fact that Petey was even on the roof, much less taking batting practice up there.

Petey, determined, quickly scooped up the roll before it could fall off the roof. As he stepped back into the batter's box, I noticed his back foot was now planted in the tar-laden patch where the uprooted tile once rested. No big deal. I

thought, it would give him a little extra grip, just like when major leaguers take a few seconds before each at bat digging their back foot into the dirt.

Before my mind could travel to the downside of having your foot planted in tar while you swung as hard as you could, Petey tossed the roll skyward and, as it dropped, swung as hard as he could. Unlike before, when things appeared to slow down, the events that happened next seemed rapid and awkward. The branch connected solidly with the roll and sent it sailing toward the other side of the street. Before I could even finish my thought, which was that knocking the roll over there was pretty silly because now he'd have to go across the street and get it, I heard a sharp but muffled POP, followed by a shrill cry from Petey that I at first thought was a scream of jubilation over getting a really nice hit, but what I quickly realized was a cry of pain. Petey's knee crumpled under him and his whole body smacked on the roof before tumbling over the side and thudding to the ground. Now, in an ideal situation, or in a movie, there would've been soft, cushiony bushes on the ground to adequately break Petey's fall. However the only benefit, and it was a negligible one, was that Mr. Protsam had gone an extra week before mowing his lawn, giving Petey a miniscule half inch of extra padding.

The sound of Petey hitting the roof and crashing to the ground caused Scat to stop dead in the middle of his toilet paper art and, without looking back, sprint into the night like a scared rabbit that'd just heard a nearby shotgun blast.

I stood there, frozen, clutching the roll of toilet paper—instinct wouldn't let me drop it, no matter the situation—while Petey lay writhing in anguish on the ground, grasping his knee and whimpering in pain like a scared puppy. Scat was at least a block away by now and wouldn't be seen or heard from for another week.

Before I could even get to Petey's side to see how he was, I was already mulling over the possible punishments I was going to receive, the worst, of course, being that I was going to have to come back to the Protsams's house tomorrow, in broad daylight, and clean up all the toilet paper. It was the most embarrassing and humbling experience a kid could have: cleaning up toilet paper from a yard that was not yours, thus telling all the neighborhood and any passersby "I got caught," at which point they would judge you not only on your ability to be sneaky, at which you were obviously no good, but also your TPing skills, which was unfair because we hadn't had time to finish all our rolls.

When I got to Petey his sobs were growing louder, and I knew it was only a matter of seconds before Mr. Protsam, after hearing a loud thud on the roof, would be out in the lawn and find us.

"I think I broke my knee," Petey said as I knelt beside him. It was, without a doubt, the most pain I'd ever seen anyone in or would ever see anyone in. His eyes were almost glowing red, squeezing tears out in steady waves down his

cheeks. He groaned through clenched teeth, his jaws shut tight like the doors of a tomb as he fought the pain.

"Don't worry, somebody'll be out here in a second," I said. "We'll get you help."

With those words, the expression on Petey's face went from sheer suffering to that of all-out soul searching. In the annals of Quick Thinking, Petey's decision-making process in the next few seconds ranked easily in the top ten. It was an earth-shattering dilemma: stay here, get caught, but take care of his knee... or try and make it home and work with the situation from there. His facial expressions told me he was mentally weighing his options. Until that point I had not even considered escape as a possibility—Petey had just fallen off a roof, his knee was apparently in terrible shape... fleeing was not an option, I assumed. I had underestimated, however, Petey's bravery and his commitment to the mission. He quickly sat up and steadied himself on his good leg.

"Let's go," he said, and it raised goose bumps up and down my arms.

He began hopping off on his one leg toward his house. I hurried beside him, offering a shoulder for support.

"That'll just slow us down," he said, and with that statement became the toughest person I knew.

As we fled, three good legs between us, I thought through what would've happened had Mr. Protsam walked out and found us there in his yard. What would I have said? "Petey was up on your roof getting toilet paper, and he tried to hit it with a stick, and he fell"? I guess that would've done it. We were still about a block from Petey's house when he paused and spoke.

"Let's go over here and rest a sec," he said, and he hopped in between some houses and behind a large bush. He dropped quickly to the grass and gently touched his knee, which cause him to grimace in pain.

"Maybe we should look at it," I said, my intentions neither noble nor medically motivated. I just wanted to see something gross. It wouldn't be often that I'd be this close to an injury and it not be on me. Petey slowly lifted the leg of his sweatpants up and over his knee. Even in the shadows, I could see that something was very wrong. His kneecap, now a quickly purpling mass, was twisted grotesquely to the side of his knee. I shuddered aloud. Petey began to cry.

"Should you move it back in place?" I asked, emphasizing the 'you', as there was no way I was touching it.

"I'm not gonna mess it up any more," he said, and gently pulled his pant leg back down.

"At least there isn't bone sticking through the skin," I said, always the optimist.

Petey fought back his tears. I knew full well that if he'd been alone, he would have been crying like a kid who'd fallen off his tricycle and skinned his elbows. I guess he was trying to maintain some level of toughness, which he had already

proven to me tenfold by just being able to get up off the Protsam's lawn.

"We gotta come up with something, Gus... something I can tell my mom," he implored.

"You mean how you did this?" I said. Of course. He couldn't just tell his mom what had really happened. By making it home, he had bought a ticket to freedom, and he intended to use it. "Well... umm... you gotta make it absolutely ludicrous."

"Why?" he coughed through sniffles.

"Because," I said, "the more embarrassing it is, the more likely she is to believe it. Nobody will think you're lying, because if you're gonna lie, why tell one that makes you look like a moron?" It was one of the most logical ideas I'd had in my life.

"Yeah," Petey replied. "I guess."

"I mean, if you say you did something, like, you were just walking around, and you turned the corner and it happened, she might think you're up to something. But, if you make yourself sound like a goof, and say you were, like, dancing in the bathroom or something—" We stopped and our eyes met in a moment of realization.

"That's it," he nodded. "I woke up to go to the bathroom, the radio in my room was on, and I could still hear it, and as I was washing my hands, I started Poplocking, and boom."

"No... not Poplocking. That doesn't have you twisting the right way, like you did. You have to kinda be able to tell the doctor what happened."

"What about the King Tut?" he asked.

"That doesn't twist you either," I said.

"I could just say I was doing the Twist."

"Nobody's gonna believe you were doing the Twist on purpose. Make yourself look like a fool, but not that much of a fool."

Our minds raced through all known break dancing moves, scanning for one that included a twisting move similar to swinging a bat.

"The Burnout," I decided. "That'll work." Of course, the Burnout! An intricate break dancing move involving extended arms, stylish, rhythmic steps, and most importantly for Petey—twisting legs.

Petey mulled it over. "Yeah, that one is good. That'll be it."

"I love it when a plan comes together," I said.

"Could you help me up?" Petey asked, wiping away tears. "If I don't do something about this soon I'm going to pass out."

"Alright," I said. "Just try and take deep breaths." This was the extent of my first-aid knowledge. I had remembered a scene from Micki and Maude in which one of the women—whichever of the two, Micki or Maude, was the more attractive one—was very near giving birth. She had the same look of pain on her face that Petey was wearing, and people were repeatedly telling her to "breathe".

I assumed breathing must be good for that level of discomfort. Going into labor, having your kneecap out of place... there was a fine line, I figured. I helped him to his foot and he used my shoulder as a crutch as we hobbled toward his house.

"Where'd Scat go?" he grunted, in between attempts to fight back tears.

"He ran off when you fell," I said. "I imagine he's in his room with his BB gun, ready to defend himself against the FBI agents he thinks are coming for him." I expected at least a giggle from Petey, but got nothing. Either his pain was so overwhelming that he wasn't really listening to me, or, more likely, he knew that was exactly what Scat was doing at the moment.

We made it to his house and silently moved to the back door.

"Thanks," he whispered.

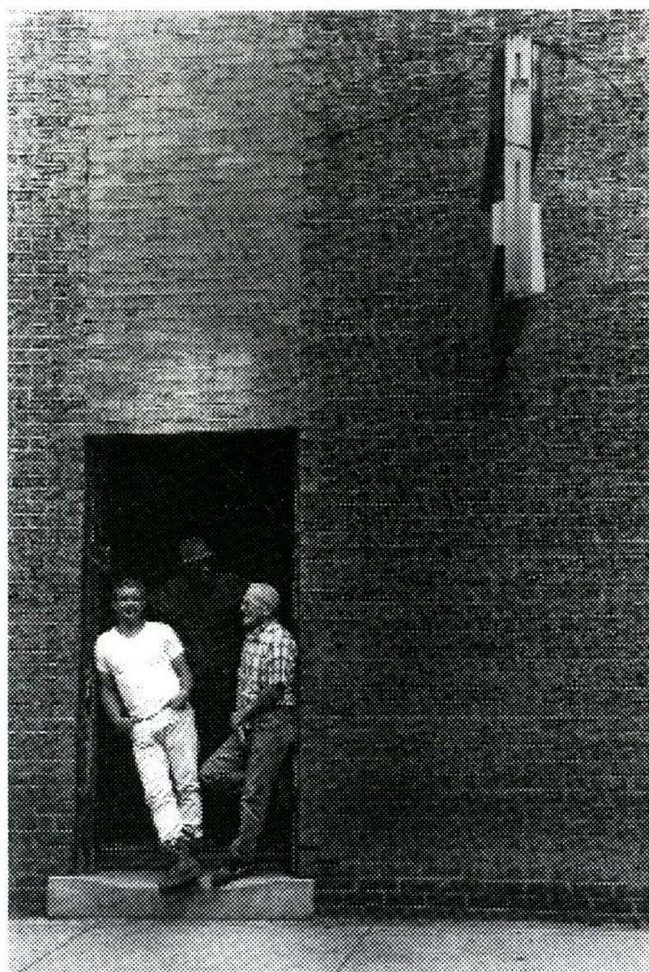
"Good luck," I said. "Hey, you might want to change out of those clothes. Your parents might get suspicious."

Petey gave a thumbs up, and crept back into his house.

As I made it to the end of Petey's street I looked back just in time to see his parents' bedroom light come on. The plan was in motion.

I snuck home, still on the lookout for the possibility of cars, especially one of the Protsam cars, out looking for whoever was foolish enough to TP their house and leave extra rolls to spare. I thought to myself of all Petey had staved off by being able to get up before someone caught us. If he had been caught, the truth about what had happened would've spread through the gossipy neighborhood faster than mono at a game of "Spin The Bottle". It would have made him the laughingstock of all Forest Meadows. People from all over would know that Petey was not a talented athlete when on a roof in the dark. And worst of all, the Protsam girls, with their cackling voices and their book smarts, would gleefully tell all their marching band friends ASAP, meaning Petey would receive no less than a full month of the dreaded whisper-point-giggles in the hallway. Which isn't to say people wouldn't know what happened. This was not a story I could keep entirely to myself. I just wasn't going to spread it around like gossip.

I was tempted to go back, in honor of Petey, and finish the toilet paper job. But I knew that Petey bumping on the roof had certainly woken someone, if not everyone, in the Protsam home. To get caught now, after all we'd been through, would be an absolute kick in the pants. I went home, slipped back through my window, and quickly drifted to sleep, visions of toilet tissue and falling friends frolicking in my dreams. •



Untitled

MAKIKO SASANUMA

Yours

ANDI FEKETE

I am your oriental fighting fish.
I am your blue, alive thing
To keep here in bulbous glass,
Framing my eyes that watch you so,
When you come to feed me.

I swim in circles,
Fanning my tail in slow water
Thick like evening and speak
Though you cannot hear,
But oh, how you love to watch
My blushing lips move.

You Have Been My Poetry

ANDI FEKETE

You have been my poetry.

You have been the kind of storms that talk,
whisper through half open windows,
keeping me awake as I lay
beside the wrong lover.
In dreams you've been
petals falling or
drowning in hazy, pastel oceans
where I struggle to save you.

You have stepped into my life,
marched out
Hell fire angry.

(then stumbled back in)

Like rain takes to grass in summer,
you sometimes come to me
saying,
write about me—
again

Once I moved to a faraway city.
You were silent movies,
playing in my sleep, sparking
in the dark.
I took a morning train home.

Petals Falling

ERIN BOGGS

Petals falling
Off a flower
Falling from my hand.
I grow weary of reaching out
To save you.
I'll let you fall
And see how you like
Being on the floor
Without me.

Virgil Wins One

GRETCHEN ACKER

"Whole damn place is gonna catch fire."

She stared at him for a moment trying to decide if she wanted to sit the laundry basket down or just hit him with it. Virgil and his little homilies of wisdom. If they weren't Biblical they were just plain stupid, and seeing as how Virgil hadn't been back to church since they'd baptized Cullet—that being 20 years ago—she knew better than to expect anything profound from his mouth by now. She nodded and continued out the kitchen door.

"Didya here me?" Virgil offered though the rusted screen of the door, leaning back ever so slightly to see around the edge of the interior door onto the porch where Myna stood.

"Yes, Virgil. Yes, I heard you. Who the hell else is out here? What'd you think, I'm listen to you, and thinking it's the damn dog?"

"Shadup!"

"Shadup!" Myna repeated rolling her feet on the parched and dusty boards of the porch as she considered going back into the house for a pair of slippers. She wasn't looking forward to the walk across the back lawn to the clothesline. The damn thing was a good sixty feet from the house and the damned dogs had done so much running around there wasn't enough grass or scrub to make a whistle out of much less protect feet from the heat stored up in the hard packed earth.

She turned back to the house, ready to go in and find a pair when she heard Virgil singing as he tilted the chair back and forth on its creaky legs.

"Myna bird, Myna bird, mouthy little dog turd."

That son of a bitch had been singing that song since they were in grade school and she ought to have known better than to marry him then, but oh no, Virgil Smollet had dreams. He was going places. He was leaving this town. Gonna go work up in Mount Temperance at the car dealership til he could afford one of his own, and then he and Myna would be set for life. Sellin' Cat-till-acks to rich people with nothing better to buy. What had never occurred to Myna soon-to-be-Smollet-Price until much later was this one simple thing—What rich people?

What rich people indeed. Maybe up in one of the tourist cities where the Indians sold their stuff, and there were museums and theatre and cultural centers. Maybe up in Santa Fe, but not out here. This was true to life by God desert and there wadn't nothing out here green, much less dollar bills. No damn Cadillacs either, just trucks, lots of trucks, some with parts cut out or off so the damn gritty

dirt could be washed out with a hose. Didn't matter much right now there wasn't a whole lot of washing going on round here anyway as far as Myna could tell. She'd already wasted a good amount of water washing the damn clothes, but she couldn't bear seein' Virgil wear the same damn pants one more day.

They'd been stuck out here for a week all alone together with no rain and no way out. The radiator on the truck wasn't in any shape to compete with temperature up to 108 degrees. Beside that, getting stuck on a lonesome road in the middle of the day with a car that won't work while the sun bakes you out like a nut from a husk in a fireplace just wasn't Myna's idea of fun, even if it would get her away from Virgil. So she'd sat here all damn week listening to him sing that damn song and blather on about how he might want to sell the property and her biting her tongue the entire time. Thinking more often than not that a person had to own property to sell it and owing taxes from here to the day the Lord comes sure means you don't own nothin' so far as she could tell.

"Sum bitch," that's what her Ganny Rose had called Virgil from the first moment she'd seen him and it galled Myna as she hung the sheets and Virgil's pants up that Ganny Rose was probably laughing at her from on high in heaven while she Myna Smollet-once-upon-a-time-Price hung clothes up and scorched in a hell here on earth.

Walking back to the house took a little longer mostly because Myna's feet felt like an ear of corn, still wrapped in husk and silk thread, thrown into a fire and slow roasted until the kernel skin was translucent and shiny. The porch boards felt cool next to the burn of the ground and she was actually starting to smile when she heard it again.

"Myna bird, Myna bird, mouthy little dog turd."

"Sum bitch." She smiled then as she said it, and stepped back into the less active heat of the kitchen.

"You never could take a joke."

"You ain't never said a damn thing that's funny, Virgil. Maybe the problem ain't me, it's you," she said pointing her finger at him.

Then there was the rumble, so far into the past as to be forgotten, followed by the quick hissing sound of a thousand snakes dancing a burlap bag. Myna turned around in shock as the dogs out in the yard began to bleat and howl in repressed joy as fat drops of rain transformed the charcoal of their noses into a deep and creamy onyx.

She turned back to glare at Virgil and his laughter; already so deep he held one hand to his stomach.

"Well, if you'da known that you coulda saved some water, now couldn't you Myna bird."

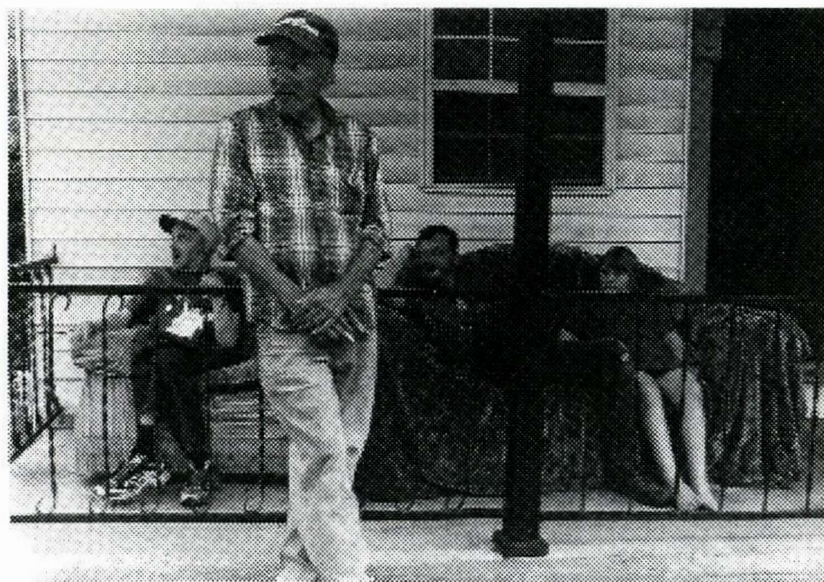
"Fuck you runnin', Virgil," she said sprinting to get the sheets before they were soaked by the metallic smelling rain.

"Naw you're the one runnin' Myna," he called out as he watched her from

the door. "I'm stayin' right here."

She turned quickly on the bare earth, now turning to mud, and flipped him his own Myna bird before continuing.

"Smile, Myna," he commanded still laughing. "Rain's the Lord's own righteous gift, especially out here." •



Untitled

MAKIKO SASANUMA

Inside of Me

LAURA MAYNARD

Inside of me a strange place
A place of comfort and a place of fear
Inside of me is a masked face
A place of disguise and a place of fraud
Inside of me is a frightening sight
A place of dark and a place of light
Inside of me are many tears
A place to scream and no one hears
Inside of me lies all my truth
A place that contains a forbidden fruit
Inside of me lies many tales
A place where only I guide the sails
Inside of me I live alone
A place where no one dares to roam
Inside of me only I can see
A place where I can be with me
Inside of me don't ask to go
A place that only I should know
Inside of me won't you look?
A place where your entire being shook
Inside of me will you come?
A place to share the pain in me
Inside of me I need you here
A place to take away the fear
Inside of me are you still here
A place for you to hold dear
Inside of me let's leave behind
A place that clutches at my spine
Inside of me I want to leave
A place where I can only grieve
Inside of me please let me out
A place where others shout
Inside of me come and set me free
A place where I can just be me

Memorial

SARABETH MILLS

I.
Two grey birds flew high
Sharp claws grasp thousands
Life crushed in their fall

II.
Orange fire orbs
Stale smell of melted metal
Dust made day night

III.
Debris-mountain smokes
Ants on a hill crawl
Listening for breath

Tears of an Angel



jennifer lynch

Death Dons a Jumpsuit

KIM TINGLER

Misrepresented
A grey cloud,
A black shroud or
Christopher Walken.
Death is not a dark angel
Scanning doorways for scarlet lamb smatterings

Bedazzled, bell-bottomed
He dons a jumpsuit
Because I entertained him once,
Serving him my worst pieces to satisfy his appetite.
He parachutes back.
The diamond studded belt
Seduces me.

Good days find me withholding desires,
Discreetly turning him into the street
To prey on postal employees.
Bad days find him in my bed,
Spoonng, smoking,
While my chest heaves
From pumping CPR
He gives me from behind.

Miss Lucy Suicide

KIM TINGLER

an annoying neighbor
dropping by for a chat
because you entertained her
once with iced tea
consideration.
wearing a Hawaiian print
mumuu
pinning her hair
rambling on.
she overstays
her welcome
knowing you secretly
comfort in her company.



United

TRAVIS SAYRE



Untitled

MOLLIE WOODY

Locust Years: An Autobiography (excerpt)

JENNIFER GINGERICH

"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten..."—Joel 2:25

I was nine when I first remember the locusts coming, swarming—a plague. Their red, beady eyes like protruding balls on the sides of their heads sharply contrasted their thin, black bodies. They appeared as solid as bullets, but they squirted liquid when they were splattered against the school building with a four-square ball. Their thin, transparent wings made them fly clumsily, too fragile to carry their grotesque, awkward bodies. The day they crawled their way out of the tiny holes of the yard, I feared that the world was coming to an end. My mother assured me that it wasn't.

"Every thirteen years," she said. "They'll be back when you're 21." So far away—surely I wouldn't live that long.

"Why do they come?" I asked my mother, fearing that God was punishing the world for its evils. (I was raised Protestant, Nazarene, to be exact, so guilt played a huge role in my life.)

"It's nature's way," my mother answered to appease me, not knowing herself. For hours, I sat backwards on the couch looking out the window. My sister and brother sat on either side, and for once, we had no desire to play outdoors.

Despite the presence of the locusts, the grass continued to need mowed. This meant that my sister and I had to pick up any large branches from the yard, so that our father could steer unimpeded across the lawn. We didn't think about the ninety-degree heat that summer. We only thought about locusts. My father wasn't scared of them, though, and spent the entire day behind the push-mower, chopping them like a food processor. Gwenny, my older sister, and I ran down the side porch steps, jumping when threatened to be the target of one of those bizarre, cigar-like cicadas. We used trashcan lids and two foldout lawn chairs as islands in the yard. We jumped from one to the other so that we wouldn't feel the plague-like insects beneath our feet. Standing on one lid or chair, we would pick up another and lay it out in front of us, throwing the sticks as close as we could to the giant trashcan. We did this until we scoured the entire yard.

When our father came in for a break, our mom stopped him at the screen door and broomed off the locusts that clung to his shirt and pants like leeches trying to suck out bad blood from a diseased man. We believed our father *was* diseased. Not from any specific illness, but our father was sick with meanness.

We celebrated when the locusts left that summer. Street sweepers cleaned

away their life-less carcasses as thousands, *millions* of them lay in piles along the streets and interstates. Of course, *everyone* was thankful when the locusts died, but we, we celebrated!

My name is Corinne Kandalesky and I am a survivor of locusts. Twice now I have survived them. I still don't know their purpose in coming. Maybe someday I will understand. I always liked the name Corinne. It isn't *really* my name, but I always liked to pretend it was. When my sister and I played school as children, my name never changed.

"My name is Corinne." I announced as if my sister should expect anything different. "Corinne Kandalesky."

My sister was more creative. She thought of a different name each time we played. My *real* name is Alena Maynard. The first part isn't so bad, but the second, well, you try living with a name like "*Maynerd*."

During my first summer of locusts, my family lived in a shoe box-like house on Wychewood Cove. My mother gave birth to three children: the first two only fourteen months apart, and the third only eighteen months later. My mother is a fighter, a rock. My father was the family antagonist. He was a plumber and hid beer in the crawl spaces of our house. He was a Vietnam vet and collected unused ammunition in an area where fighting had occurred. He lied about his age when he joined the army, and when he was finally awarded a trip to Vietnam, he got to see some of his friends hanging from trees and some with their faces blown off. To handle the stress, he shot heroin between his toes. His friends who lived did too.

My father was a lot like the locusts. He always found his way back. When my parents were first married, he escaped from a severe car accident unharmed. When the police came, they arrested him for driving without a license. My mom had to borrow my grandparents' title money to bail him out of jail. And then there was the time when we were tiny children, too young for me to remember. We found my father lying in bed one night talking to people floating in the air above him. My mother thought he had dropped acid. We took him to the emergency room and the doctors had no idea what was happening to him. When my father was finally able to tell the doctors that he had found a tick in his hair two days before, he was diagnosed with Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. He had a fever of 104 for five days. The doctors said he would suffer permanently because of this. And, he did.

At age 44, long after my parents' divorce and during a time where we had gone five years without speaking to him, he had a ski doo accident. He owned two of them. (He never paid my mother a cent in child support, but he could afford recreational sporting equipment.) He and a friend were riding on the lake, drunk. My father's friend was headed toward my father and not paying attention. At the last minute, the friend, realizing he could not escape colliding with my father,

bailed his ski doo. The ski doo hit my father square in his face. His eyes popped out of their sockets, and he lay unconscious in the water, his face peeled back. He was life-flighted to a hospital in Columbus where he stayed for eight weeks. The doctors were sure he wasn't going to make it this time. He did.

Growing up in a house with my father was like watching my parents battle their own Vietnam. Such a senseless war. On one side was my father, the mental plumber. On the other was my mother, a schoolteacher. And there were casualties: Gwenny, myself, and my brother, Richard. Why we fought him for so long, I will never understand.

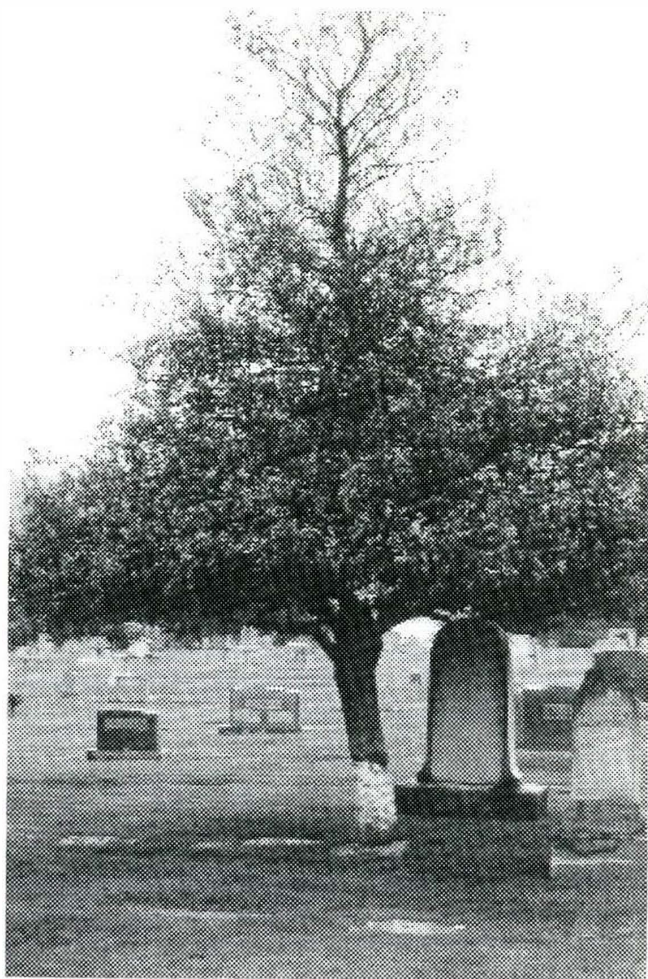
As children, we thought our lives were normal. We went to private schools, had Barbies and Tonka trucks. We had expensive Christmases and invited friends over for slumber parties on birthdays. We went to church on Sundays and Wednesdays (without my father). From the outside, people thought we existed like every other family. What they didn't know is that sometimes we slept in our clothes and shoes at night for fear of having to leave at any moment. My father was a violent man and although he never hit any of us, he made powerful threats toward himself. We knew which evenings we needed to be prepared to leave.

"Wear your clothes to bed tonight," my mother would whisper to my sister and I in our bunk beds. "Just in case."

One night our mother told us how sorry she was for allowing us to live like this. She promised that it wouldn't last much longer. She kept her promise. On a Monday, she picked us up from school and said we wouldn't be going home, ever. We drove silently in the direction of my aunt's house; we drove toward safety. My aunts and uncles had helped my mother move all of our belongings that day while Dad was at work. We had no idea; we had been sitting in our classrooms and playing with friends at recess. As my mother drove the car, she told us that God had given her a promise: to restore the years the locusts had eaten. We had no idea what she was talking about. She tried to explain, but we were children. We didn't understand. We didn't care. We did not have to be afraid of anything anymore. I sat in the back seat and tried with all of my power not to smile. That was the happiest day of my childhood.

To tell my story, I must tell the story of my father. I will try to be fair.

My earliest memory of my father was in our living room in Columbus, Ohio. I'm not sure how old I was—two, maybe three. I remember him standing on one side of the room and my sister, brother, and I standing on the other. We were in a line. I think we were racing to him. My sister and brother darted past me and I, scared to be left behind, fell and began crawling to him. It was like one of those dreams where you are trying to run from the murderer and can't. Maybe this was a dream, but I don't think so. I couldn't move fast enough and my father was laughing at me. I'm sure he wasn't being mean, but I remember being scared of him, of his laugh. That fear of him stuck. •



Where Dreams Grow & Fall

JENNIFER LYNCH

*Hunter*JAMES MADDOX

Splashing through low rain puddles,
Bright red rubber boots, invincible to water and mud.
The seven-year-old hand that grips the umbrella handle,
Has mimicked raisin features for over a half hour.
Tiny dot freckles frame long-lashed innocent eyes.
He carries a pail of frogs, covered by a beige towel
Secretly swiped from the dirty laundry basket,
"The towel's so they won't hop out."
When the rain stops, he folds the striped umbrella,
Clacks the Harold's rusty chain link fence,
Which lines the edge of the woods,
Stands two inches taller than the boy.
The clouds cast gray blue haze on trees, water, grass.
More rain would come soon.
When he goes hunting, he hunts
As if mom will let him keep that batch.
If only he had his fishing pole, they'd eat like kings.
He'd lost it the summer before last.
Reeling in a great white out of Schooner's Pond.
Stupid fish jerked it out of his arms, into the water.
So, he moved to the next best thing.
Frogs have been his prey.
"Even if mom doesn't like 'em."

"I hate this fucking job."

Knock- knock- knock

"Maybe you should try going back to school," Frank begins. "You know you only had three more semesters left."

"I know, it just got so hard and besides—"

I'm cut off by an anxious voice coming from the other side of the door.

"Who is it? What do you want?" an old woman asks, her voice penetrating through the still closed door.

"Hello, we're from Booker Floor Care ma'am," Frank says in his patented salesman voice. "We were hoping we could give you a demonstration of the new Nepo carpet cleaning system. Also, if you let us show you our product, we will give you a free two-liter of Pepsi."

"Piss off," the aged voice says. "'The Price is Right' is on and your making me miss it."

Nothing else comes from the door as Frank and I are left in silence on the front porch. We stand there for a few moments, then, I brake the quiet by saying, "Well, that was interesting. Not surprising, but interesting."

"Tell me about it," Frank says as we start down the stairs. "Last week, an old guy gave me the finger and yelled for his dogs to attack me."

"Yeah? Yesterday an elderly woman in a wheelchair told me to go screw myself," I say. "You can't help but wonder where they get these awful manners."

"You know who I think it is... Bob Barker," Frank solemnly says nodding his head. "He's going to lead them in a revolution. They feed on gambling and game shows. Then, they gather at Bingo and formulate plans for world domination."

"But it isn't only old people that are acting pissed. A couple of weeks ago, this little girl answered the door and told me to get off her porch before she kicked me in the nuts," I say with a discouraged look on my face. "The whole disposition of the world has somehow gotten extremely hateful."

"Especially to vacuum salesmen," Frank adds.

We look at the house next to us, and I wonder if the owner will have a garden hose ready to keep us off his property. I take the first step toward the house. Frank quickly follows. Today is his day to carry the box with the almighty Nepo vacuum. The entire thing, complete with attachments, weighs 25 pounds, 5 ounces, and becomes a nuisance after the third house. I carry three two-liters of

pop. I give these to people who let us into their homes.

Weeds and yellow grass overrun the targeted house. There is a swing sitting, not hanging, on the front porch. A dead potted shrub covers half of a hidden house key, and the screen door leans on the wall next to the front door.

Some people may think that the owners of these homes are dirt poor by the outward, unclean appearance. However, these people have a quality that draws salesmen to their door. They always want more stuff. And to get that stuff, they almost always find money. Looking at a front yard is the best way for us to choose our next house. The more cluttered the yard, the better our chances are for having a buyer on our hands.

Knock-knock-knock

I whistle Otis Redding's "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay," during the wait. Then, the door opens.

"Yeah, what do you want?"

"Hello. We're out doing demonstrations for our sweeper system, if you let us come in we'll give you a free two-liter." I say and hold up the two-liter of Pepsi.

"Free two-liter, huh?" he says nibbling at the bait. "I could use me some Pepsi."

He opens the door and invites us in.

"So what you boys gonna do?"

"Well, we are going to show you the power of the Nepo vacuum," Frank says, getting it out of the box. "If you'll just let us clean a spot of your floor, I'm sure that you will be amazed by what you see."

After everything is set up, Frank starts the machine and cleans a small square of carpet in the middle of the man's living room (we usually dump a pile of dirt or sand on the floor, but this guys carpet has all the junk we needed to make our point), then, backs away.

"See sir," Frank says. "See how that spot is so much lighter than the rest of your carpet."

"Yeah, I see it alright," he says. "But you aren't gonna leave it like that are you?"

"Excuse me?"

"You started the job, but you didn't finish it. Now I got a square of clean carpet and it just looks silly like that," the man says. "So, you go on and finish the job."

"Well, when you buy your own system you can clean the rest up yourself," I say sarcastically from the corner of the room.

He looks at me with an angry face. "I believe you boys have stayed longer than you should've. Give me my Pepsi and get out."

"Sure," I say and start shaking one of the two-liters up. Then, I toss it at him and wink. "Thanks for your time, *sir*."

The man literally kicks Frank out the door. I had walked out right after

throwing the pop. When Frank and his demo kit are out of the house, the man slams his door. I can hear the bolts locking as Frank gets the rest of his vacuum in the box.

"What the hell was that, huh?" Frank yells.

"What? That guy was being an ass." I say. "Besides, it wasn't like he was going to buy anything anyway."

"Still, it's not professional."

"Yeah, I know but he was asking for it. Clean the entire room! Who the hell does he think he is?"

"I don't know... hey, look over there." Frank says motioning his head for me to look across the street.

"Mormons," there are two of them in their high polished shoes, perfectly pressed slacks, shirts, solid red ties, and undecorated backpacks. They are in contradiction to the rest of the neighborhood. The shining sun captures their bright smiles and perfectly combed hair.

Spotting us, they raised their hands in simultaneous greeting. "Good afternoon, are you fellas having any luck?"

"Yeah," I say with the mean old woman from two houses up still fresh in my mind. "Actually, you two might want to try the house with the plastic flamingoes in the front yard. The woman there is friendly to people but has a slight hearing problem. When you talk to her, you have to talk really loud and slow."

"Really? Well, we can take some extra time to talk with her can't we Elder Jacobs. Thanks for the tip," one says as they both make their way across the street.

"Two birds with one stone," I say quietly to Frank.

"I can't see why you don't like them. They seem nice enough."

"Yeah, but they are salesmen, and as a rule, if they are working the same block that we are, then we are automatically at war."

"Yeah but they aren't *selling* anything."

I look at him with skeptical eyes. "They are going door to door with salvation on a string."

"Oh yeah, and what is that string attached to? I've heard of Baptists and Catholics asking for contributions all the time, but never have I heard of the Church of Latter-day Saints ask for anything from anyone."

"I'm not arguing with you right now, okay," I say feeling embarrassed of my statement. "I'm just saying they serve no better purpose than to take away our houses and our commission. Do you think that anyone would want to talk to us after having been visited by the Mormons?"

"Well, I still say that they have some reason for being out here, and it's not just to take away our sales."

"Whatever, you keep saying that when you get evicted for not paying your rent."

From behind us we hear the old woman yelling, "Damn it, why the hell are

you talking so slow? I told you, I'm missing my program!" and even Frank can't hold himself back from laughing. We watch the Mormons come running down the steps of her porch.

"Ha, ha," one of the Mormons says coming up to us from the house. "Very funny."

With a smirk on my face, I turn away and walk down the sidewalk. Frank offers a small apology to them, then, runs to catch up with me.

We walk for a while longer and I say, "If we don't get into the next one we try, I'm going home. I'll let you pick the house."

Frank sets the vacuum box down and looks over the choices.

"How about that one," he says. "It looks alright."

"Whatever man, lets just get this over with," I say not even paying attention to which house he is talking about.

We get up to the house and Frank says, "Hey, this house number is 777. That's got to be a good sign, right?"

I reach for the door.

Knock

I look at my scuffed up shoes, wishing I had the money to buy a nice new pair. Money is always a problem. It was the real reason I quit school. Not because the classes were hard, like I claimed. College was expensive. The salesman job pays great when it works out, but it seems that every block I go to is already being worked by Mary Kays, Girl Scouts, Joseph Smiths or little children selling fundraiser candy bars. Suddenly, the door opens and pulls me out of my thoughts.

"I hate fucking salesmen," I hear before opening my eyes. "I'm sorry, but I forgot to ask what your names are," the man asks Frank. I can't say anything because my mouth is duct taped.

All I remember from before was a thin, pale man dressed in a long-sleeved black shirt invited us into his home. He brought us to his living room and asked us to sit down while he went to the kitchen. He came back and handed us each a glass of tea. We all talked and drank for a while, and soon after, Frank went into his sales pitch and I remember feeling sleepy.

Now, I wake to this.

"My name is Frank. His is John," Frank says, sobbing. A flap of tape hangs just off the side of Frank's mouth as he talks to the man. On his cheeks, trails of Frank's tears shine. "What are you going to do to us?"

"Frank," the man says. "You don't need to worry about that right now. I just want to talk to you and... I'm sorry, what was his name again?"

"J-John."

"Ah yes, John," he says and looks over at me with a smirk on his face. "Tell me Frank, do you like life?"

"Yes," Frank says immediately.

"What do you enjoy most about your life?"

"I don't know," Frank says.

"You don't know? Frank, you'll have to do better than that," he says. "There must be something that makes you get up in the morning and go to your miserable job. So, what is it?"

"I-I-I..." Frank is crying uncontrollably

"Damn it, if you say 'I don't know,' I'm afraid I'll have to kill you," he says and pulls a knife from his pocket. Frank cries, and I must admit that a few tears fall from my eyes too. "Frank, there's no need to cry," the man says, wiping the tears from Frank's face with the dark sleeve of his shirt. "I just want to know your motivation for going door-to-door and disturbing people from their daily lives."

"We are just trying to sell some vacuums."

"Frank, don't you think if people wanted vacuums, they would go out and get them," the man questions. "Or at least call you to come to their homes? The nerve you two must have to think that you and your product are so important that—"

The man's face becomes red with fury, when suddenly...

Ding dong

The man looks away from Frank and is quiet for a moment. Then, he looks back at Frank and puts the tape back over his mouth. Next, he goes to the door of the room we are in, opens it and walks out. From outside the room, I can make out three different mumbled voices. One of them is our host. Not long after that, the man comes back into the room. Frank and I both look up at him. He has a smile on his face and as soon as he reaches us he says, "I'm sorry, but I've decided to leave you for a while."

My eyes, almost thankful, widen, but Frank still has a worried look on his face.

"We'll have to postpone our little discussion," the man says. "I'm more of a fan for religious conversations. I hope you understand."

He turns, walks to the door and opens it, then, calls into his living room. "I'll be there in a moment. Would you two like some tea?" He takes another look at us and walks out the door.

For a second, Frank and I just look at each other in the light filtered through the plaque-yellow window curtain. Then, we both start struggling to squeeze out of the thick layers of tape wrapped around our hands. We are as quiet as worms wiggling through dirt, but the man knew how to tape up a person. I am about to accept defeat when I see Frank's fist shoot up in forceful freedom.

He starts ripping tape off himself, and soon, is able to stand from his chair. He rushes over to the window and parts the hanging curtain. I start to get worried as he unlatches the window's lock and slowly opens it. He sticks his head out side, then, comes back and starts pinching at the tape ends around my mouth. He rips the strip off. I don't dare say ouch. He then separates me from the chair by taking the tape off my chest, wrists and ankles.

We climb out the window and silently head for the road, wincing at the sound of crunching dried leaves. As we make our way along the house, we come to a window. Frank drops to his knees and crawls under it. I'm about to do the same when I hear the man laugh from inside. I slowly creep up to the edge of the window and look to see who has taken our place, but all I can spot are two glasses of water sitting on the top of the coffee table, the leg of a creased pair of pants and one gleaming shoe. A wall separating the living room from the kitchen blocks the rest.

Frank starts hitting my leg and waving me to hurry up. I crawl under the window, get to my feet and we both start running down the street for Frank's car. We make it and Frank pulls his keys out his pocket and unlocks the doors.

"What the Hell was that?" Frank says once he gets inside. "We have to go get the police!"

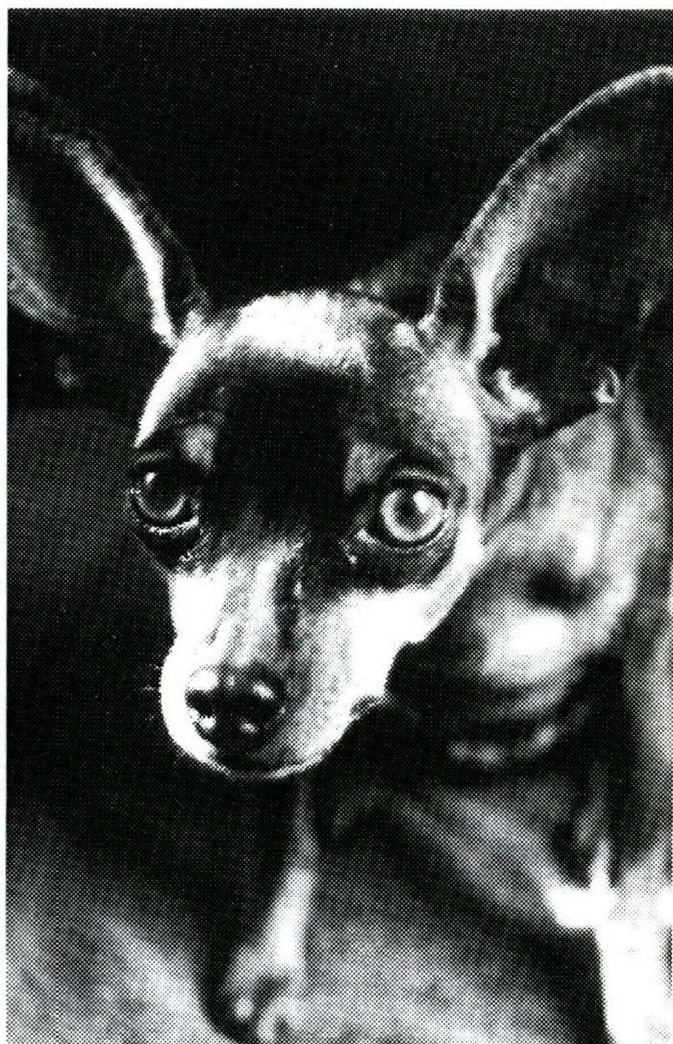
"I'm not doing this shit anymore," I say, opening the glove box that I stashed my cigarettes before we started. Frank didn't even seem to notice that I was smoking in his car.

Frank starts the engine and rushes off to alert anyone he can find in a uniform. His driving so rushed, it's scaring me. He accelerates, moving faster and faster down the unfamiliar streets.

"Frank, maybe you should slow down a little, eh?" I say and flick my half smoked cigarette out the window and grab onto the handle above the door.

"I have to get somewhere safe," he says and pushes harder on the gas.

We charge past lawn gnomes, plastic milk cows, sunflower windmills, and bumble bee wind chimes. He's driving so fast and passing so many things, that he doesn't see the stop sign, and a Volkswagen van going 35 miles per hour smashes into the front end of Frank's car. •



Lucie

JEFF GINSNER

Under the Knife

SECOND PLACE POETRY

LISA ROBINSON

I remember a high whine
in the key of d minor, the rotation of a
skull saw blade, how we ate telekinesis
from a sterile bowl and didn't breathe for
hours, the way she said:

"Get me a glass of water and I'll
count how many summers I have
suffered."

And so I have suffered, too.
Trauma to the id, a bright white blackout:
my lips, transparent, turning blue.
A loose suture. An organ makes a break.
now my back is strapped
to seven mattresses: I am the pea
under the princess.

I've got gobs of god stuck in my hair.

I've got a lung full of liquid oblivion
—it seeps a purple stain.
I've got feet that just won't quit
(and toenails the size of armageddon).
I've got broken teeth from broken homes:
they speak in forked tongues.
I've got yellow orbs coming out of my
asshole, a trunkload of vulgar viscera,
a deviated rectum.
I've got dysentery of the vowels:
oobladi ooblada.

A boy asks: "What does anesthesia
taste like?"

Dust. It tastes like dust.



Face

MEREDITH PARSONS

Consumed

FIRST PLACE FICTION

LISA ROBINSON

I thought of him as being made of many sculptured and renewable components. Like a fabricated forest, an ecosystem of tissues and veins, each part individually hand-crafted and custom designed, self-sustaining, built to endure. Such was his perfection. We had names, but we didn't know them nor would we have been able to distinguish one another from those metonymic symbols. Such was the extent of our disease. This is an account of how we gave ourselves away and were consumed. This is not my story; my story begins next week when I am murdered in a shopping mall. This is about consumption, but it is not our story. This is a dramatic re-enactment of our story.

It was summer and we met in an afterthought. Back in those days, we were drowning in sweat. He was a capitalist and a janitor or a Marxist and a proletariat; I could never keep them straight. I was a waitress in an all-night diner that specialized in experimental breakfast cereals. We fell in love over shredded wheat with cherry pie filling and moved in before finishing our coffee. The apartment we rented was in a brick building with a laundromat and Coke machines, and a kidney-shaped pool in the yard. We had a green bathroom, two bedrooms, a walk-in closet, paid cable. We adopted a cat and some houseplants. Rain fell in other cities but not where we lived.

Our upstairs neighbors were elephants posing as college students or vice versa; either way, they could've been in the circus. Late at night they used the light fixtures as trapeze bars to practice somersaults or study the properties of aerodynamics; either way, they landed on the ceiling like piles of bricks. Our relationship with them was amicable and symbiotic; we pounded on their floor with a broom and they ignored us. Meanwhile, the psychic who lived next door told us that we had a love deeper than the Marianus Trench, that she could tell by the way we parted our hair. She was so right it scared us out of our shoes.

Monday through Friday, he worked nine to five and I pulled the night shift. In those days we passed more than we converged, like people on the street, and we communicated through telepathy and Post-its stuck to the refrigerator, the hub of our discourse. Our only real time together was on the weekends, when we pretended to be married under no certain terms. There were mornings and things. Sitcoms. Brushing each other's teeth. We read the newspaper and looked at houses for sale and dreamed of the wallpaper we'd have, the appliances. Someday we would plant roots, have things growing in the front lawn; a swing set and gnomes, a barbecue grill. Our children would have rhyming names: Stan and Fran, Ron and Juan, Jimmy and Timmy and Kim.

We wanted to preserve those weekends in a glass case and live inside like fossils. For us, the world was condensed into a microcosm of two-day blocks; the rest were irrelevant sequences with irreverent dialogues. We tried to prevent them from happening by refusing to mark them off the calendar, but they wouldn't go away. So he took charge and decided that no woman of his would work for a living; he was sentimental like that. I stayed in the apartment and vacuumed and baked little cakes while he scrubbed toilets at the Y. I whistled the theme to *Leave It to Beaver* and cooked square meat from square cans in a square skillet. When he came home we ate dinners on trays. Sometimes he called me Jeannie, but that wasn't my name. I called him Master, for fun. Sometimes he serenaded me with *I Dream of Jeannie* but my hair wasn't light brown. He loved me that much.

After we finished our meals, I'd wash the dishes and then we'd curl up in concentric circles in front of the television, imitating our cat. It seemed our bodies were melding together as we laid there, like we were going through mitosis in reverse. When we held hands, we couldn't tell our fingers apart. We didn't know who was who anymore. If he wanted a drink, I reached for his glass. If I was hungry, he ate a cracker and I licked the salt from my lips.

During the day while he worked we were like separated conjoined twins and we each felt the absence of the other, the phantom itch, the severed limb. I kissed his socks and underwear before I tucked them in his drawer, as if I was sending them off to bed. There were instances when I'd get a mysterious whiff of Sani-Flush or a sudden shock, like static electricity from a doorknob, and I knew he was thinking about me. The longing became unbearable; the anticipation of him was more than I could stand. Sometimes I missed him so bad I licked his boots and rubbed his picture on my chest.

Our evolution began when he quit his job.

We never left the apartment after that and didn't shower or bother with groceries. If we had any, we could've cooked french fries in our oily hair. We forgot about the laundry and garbage overflowed from the can; toenail clippings, wadded Kotex, snotty tissues all over the floor. There were warrens of dust bunnies in every corner, but we could have cared less. The mail, the telephone, knocks at the door, they didn't matter to us, like geometry or the price of packaged ham.

Instead, we had fevered conversations that spilled from us like avalanches, from the inside out. A new language emerged from the blind spot between our eyes, previously unspoken or unseen. Words and sentences piled up like our garbage and we kicked them aside or grinded them into the carpet with our heels to make room for more. Our hands gestured dramatically in their flight, like bats, and fluttered around the room on tangents of their own. Handless, he told me how he died once in a field of corn and couldn't find his way to the afterlife; how he was paranoid of birds and car fumes and the color teal; how, like any other boy, he ate pennies, he masturbated, and he wanted to be a pilot of paper airplanes.

I told him about the morning I woke up under a river and turned into clay; about how I lost twenty percent of my vocabulary when the house I grew up in was destroyed by fire; about my love for the taste of spicy things like sulfur, like voodoo.

Eventually we had to pay the rent and then we were bankrupt. To compensate, we had a yardsale by the pool and sold everything we owned, except the TV, and made enough money to last almost a week. But there were bills and things. Obligations and debts to society. We could never pay them off. For days we cried and comforted each other in the solace of our humid apartment. We dehydrated with sadness when we considered all the times we had taken our lamps for granted and thought of water as free. One minute we were turning on the faucet and flicking on the light and the next we were threatened with the prospect of a dry and dark continuum that would consume us before we could ever make sense of it. All along, though, the answer was so close, we couldn't even see it; it was right beneath the surface of our skins. Our veins bulged and throbbled from the heat and tried to give us clues, but we didn't catch on. It was when we were wrapped around each other on the living room floor like two rare monkeys at the zoo, our hearts pressed together, pounding in tandem, that he devised a grand and ingenious scheme: we would sell ourselves. It was a small sacrifice, and like any other it began with blood.

So we went downtown to the blood bank and filled out forms. We sat on green vinyl chairs and wrote our histories in clear and legible print in the whitest room I had ever seen. Did we weigh more than 110 pounds? Did we ever have Hepatitis? Use intravenous drugs? The nurses who took our clipboards were nice, plump women in smocks with smudged lipstick and hair done up in loose, sloppy buns. They laid us side by side on padded tables with wheels and giggled like pink virgins as they rolled up our sleeves. I imagined that the needle entering my arm was him, that he was inside my body like a giant sterilized mosquito. I don't have to explain the symbolism. We watched ourselves travel through plastic tubes and end up in plastic bags that were bound for highway accidents and football stadiums and operating rooms. The smell of blood and antiseptics was sharp as metal in our nostrils and brought tears to our eyes. Or maybe it was happiness; we couldn't be sure.

After we gave them our blood, they threw a pizza party for us so we wouldn't faint. We felt special and pampered when they served us ginger ale in paper cups with Bugs Bunny on them, like we were sick and in the second grade. They paid us in cash, they paid exclusively in cash, and we skipped away with Bugs Bunny Band-Aids and fists full of stiff green bills. We couldn't go back for 56 days, but we found other means.

He sold his sperm by the gallon. He said they gave him magazines, but he didn't use them; he thought of me instead. I thought of the people his sperm would become, people we would never know. There would be boys in Arkansas

with blunt noses just like his, left-handed girls in North Carolina, sets of twins in one of those boxy states who could roll their tongues. We waved goodbye to them in their plastic containers. They wagged their tails like dogs.

Then we found out about plasma. We didn't know we had any. We thought it was gelatinous and glowed in the dark. We thought it was napalm. We thought only people with tentacles and three eyes had plasma, like in movies at two a.m. on Saturday nights. Twice a week, we went to ambiguous brick buildings that could've housed travel agencies or law offices. Only the doors said North American Biomedical, Inc., stenciled in black letters. He wore a suit and a tie. I wore an Easter dress. To passersby, we could've been on our way to purchase airline tickets for our honeymoon to Aruba or the Swiss Alps. For all anyone knew, he could've been a partner in a firm and I could've been his young wife, we looked that hopeful. We felt that important.

We discovered how profitable our bodies could be that summer, how expendable our parts. Like chameleons, we regenerated and grew new tails. And we were as colorful as chameleons, too: green, purple, and yellow in the crooks of our arms, black beneath our eyes, our veins bright blue. He told me I was more beautiful than a sunset, than the Northern Lights, than the Technicolor of our TV screen.

But somehow it was never enough. We didn't know where the money went: it scattered like roaches. It didn't leave a note on the fridge to say whether or not it was coming back. We weren't good with things like that and we didn't care: we didn't even own a clock. We bought stamps but we didn't send any letters or pay any bills. We bought lottery tickets but we never checked to see if we'd won. Bank statements meant nothing to us: they flew around our apartment like paper moths and died violent deaths on the windowsills, incinerated in the sun.

And the sun was so bright I was afraid it would burn out, that, like a candle, it burned brightest at the end. Every day was a solstice and every day we were smothered by our own heat. Moving only circulated hot air so we lay in puddles by the toilet, still as mudfish. My pores were tiny open mouths trying to drink a breeze that wasn't there.

When I gave up my hair for cancer victims, it felt like a blessing because I could finally breathe. They scalped me like a Puritan and displayed my hair on a styrofoam head with no face. I wanted to put my picture on it to see what I looked like to him. Was I pretty? Was I plain? Was my head shaped like an egg? I couldn't tell. They paid me four hundred dollars and I decided I felt sorry for the cancer patient who got my hair. It danced with static, was temperamental, and had an aversion to combs.

During the afternoons the air was a tactile thing, dense and sticky like Egg Foo Young. I wondered if we were in Hiroshima, if someone had dropped a bomb. We dragged ourselves in slow motion and radiation from blood bank to blood bank, from fertility clinic to fertility clinic. We lied on our forms. We covered our

needle marks with beige Revlon foundation. I wore a wig. We had to take precautions so the lab technicians wouldn't catch on. To keep our iron levels high, we chewed Flintstones vitamins like gum. We needed protein, but it was too hot to cook so we ate the houseplants I had cultivated on love and sunshine, with vegetable oil and garlic salt for flavor. They still tasted like dirt.

There were some benefits to our new diet: I was pleased with how thin I was becoming, how heroin chic. I looked like the women in fashion magazines, all cheek and hipbones and vaguely human limbs, skulls with skin stretched across tight as spandex. I wore a bikini to the pool to make the teenage girls go purge their bean sprout sandwiches or their pineapples-and-cottage cheese. They fawned over the empty bowl of my stomach, its attractive concave quality. They asked for my autograph: they wanted to play songs on my ribs. They applauded how bold and trendy I was for being bald and they convinced me it was true. I told him I wanted a head as smooth as a pea, but he wouldn't let me shave the stubble. I would grow more hair, he said. I was a jackpot. I was a cash crop. He wanted to plant seeds.

He had plans for the future. We would sell our babies on the Internet. We'd be sharing little pieces of ourselves with the world, he said. We would send our extensions on grand adventures and eventually they would come back to us and tell us their life stories. They would speak different languages but they would all feel the same void inside, the same longing to know where their predilection for scouring bathtubs came from, why their hands were always clammy, why they couldn't tell time. In an afternoon they'd decide that they loved us more than they ever loved their other parents, the temporary ones, and then, at last, they'd move in with us. By then we would have a big house in the country. We would be a family.

We tried to execute this plan on the floor of our bedroom. We didn't have a bed anymore, but we thought the room itself would arouse something in my uterus, that something would take hold in those arid walls. We were thinking psychologically. But it was summer and everything had dried up. When we kissed, our tongues welded to the roofs of our mouths. Our lips were glued together with strange gummy paste. He laid on top of me but nothing went in and nothing came out.

We decided we'd give it a few days and try again, but things were different somehow, something had changed. We seemed to be in the midst of some new season where it was hot and cold at the same time. I knew I had to be imagining it, the thermometer boiled in contradiction, but I felt frost in the air. Our breath hung suspended in clouds all over the apartment and we lost each other in them, so we stayed in separate rooms and took inventory of ourselves. I pinched and poked and prodded my arms looking for untapped veins. When I scratched my legs little flakes of skin flew off and piled up in drifts like snow. I gathered them in a flowerpot with dirt and put them in the brightest window. I watered them and

fed them packets of ketchup and soy sauce and hoped they would grow. Every day I checked for the beginnings of fingers, little white nubs with no nails, or two chubby feet or a fistful hand breaking through. Sometimes he went around the laundromat calling Kitty, Kitty. I knew what he was thinking, and she must have known, too, because we hadn't seen her in weeks. Mostly he stayed in the bathroom rescuing his hair from the sink drain. He pulled off bits of gunk and stuck the hairs back on his arms and chest with dabs of glue.

We were falling apart. I didn't sweat anymore. Like a baby animal, I had no scent. I stopped menstruating, too, and my teeth were loose as rocks in a driveway. There were always little spots of colored light in the corner of my vision, like stars, that exploded into entire galaxies when I stood. I fainted during Oprah and woke up to Jay Leno. The TV was always much further away than I remembered it being, and much larger. Once I had a hallucination or a dream that I was inside a test tube on a rack among other test tubes, that I had been simmered down to proteins and vitamins, like vegetable juice. I couldn't recall who drank me, Oprah or Leno.

All along, though, he never stopped planning. He was a true entrepreneur. There were other things, he said. You'd be surprised at how adaptive the human body is, how engineered with mechanisms for survival. He was smart and I believed him. He watched the Discovery channel like a zealot. I saw a program once, he said, about a girl who had half her brain removed because of a tumor and she lived like a normal person. She was valedictorian of her class. I saw another one where a skier was frostbitten on his nose so bad they had to amputate it, and so they grew another one out of his forehead. People donate kidneys every day, he said. And they live. There is a black market for corneas in Brazil.

Somehow we had given birth to an ice age in that sweltering summer. Somewhere in between the lines of the heat waves that hovered above the sidewalks, we created icicles. We didn't talk much anymore and although we both noticed it, our instinct to adapt outweighed the compulsion to start over. Inert momentum such as this is self-explanatory. When he did talk, he said things like: I want you to sell your eggs. He said it would be a simple operation. I reminded him of the babies, of the family we would have someday, that my lifetime supply of eggs was limited and unreplenishable, that I was born with a number specific to me and once they were used, I'd be as barren as the shriveled vines of ivy that wrapped around the fence by the pool. I could have a dozen; I could only have two. He told me not to worry, that I had more than I thought, thousands at least, each with a fair market value of \$2,149. I felt like some sturgeon just jerked from the river the way they plucked my eggs from my ovaries like caviar. I expected a Band-Aid and a lollipop, but all I got was a crooked pink scar.

We had other appointments, too, some with doctors, some with hopeful people whose ads he read in the paper, but we couldn't keep them all: we were getting weaker. We could barely blink our eyes. We slept sixteen hours a day and

neither of us had used the bathroom in weeks. The same roll of toilet paper hung from the dispenser: its tattered end flapped like a tongue. Our skins were white as liquid paper, transparent as greasy hamburger wrappers. When I held my hand up I'd swear I could see him on the other side, outlined in blue veins. If I could spare the energy, I'd crawl over to the pool so I could get some color, but the teenage girls were afraid of me. They looked at me like I was a ghost. And maybe I was a ghost, made up of nothing more than smoky filaments and gobs of plasma.

We were becoming desperate, too, and hungry. He said he wanted to nourish himself on my blood. I told him that the blood bank pays twenty dollars a pint and I have type O negative. I am a universal donor. I am a hot commodity. Just a taste, he begged me. If you love me. Women have ten percent more body fat than men, did you know that, he said, and pricked my thumb with a straight pin. He nursed like a lamb. It gave him an erection for the first time in a month. When he couldn't get enough, he gutted the meatiest part of my thumb like a fish, and when he finished, it *was* a fish, all puckered and sickish-white. He moved on to my index finger, but I would not be left out. I took his straight pin and his hand and he didn't even notice. I made little holes in his fingers and sucked on them like straws. How long could we hold on like that. I wondered, how long would the summer last? Forever, it seemed. And whose fingers were these in my mouth? Were they mine? Were they mine? Were they his?

SPRING 2002



Devotchka

MIKE ADKINS

Losing

KRISTEN COMER

I.

Won't you come and sift the stars with me, Friend of my soul?
There are galaxies to glean before the night is gone
and Sins to harvest here below:
Red sky beguiles like a beckoning grave
It knows what i fear, yet also crave

i gather my Rosebuds by moonlight
in the catacombs of college bars
Where girls in whore's clothing
stand still as plastic virgins
trampling Serpents underfoot.

A Man at the bar
who worships Fate as well as jesus
tells me my fortune in innocent words
and i reply, in kindly fashion:

nothing happens without reason
To every sin there is a season

He doles out penance like a traveling Priest, sips
straight scotch and murmurs,
Blood of christ.
He understands beauty, and for this I love Him;
He understands holiness, god all in all.

II.

If women's beauty builds them up
i'll never be complete:
deconstruct me pin by pin
and call my portions sweet

and my name fragrant afterthoughts
of all that i could be;
Call my remnants more than dross
before You set them free.

For death begins in Autumn
the twilight of the year,
the season of the crumbling leaf,
the time of drawing fear,
the period of laughters Lost
of chill and bleak despair,
the era of the smothered sun
above a landscape bare.

III.

i've allies in alleyways, dirty heavens
where the melancholy rises
with the chill of the evening,
dubious haunts of the grateful forsaken,
sepulchers of seventeen dreams.

If i had brinks as steep as yours,
i'd cower at the edges, scorn
the silver precipice, that last unknown
and trust His hand to guard my lips
of chipped and chastened porcelain,
to cleanse my steeped palms:
But you
speak as though it can be found again.

Don't wait
He says
let it happen

The Aviary

LARRY YOUNG

She walked into the bright aviary,
Toucans and macaws flew all around.
She thought back to a time when she was an
Ornithologist's aide in Malawi.
A time when the sun always shone blisteringly
And the rains came as quick as a cheetah.
The air was viscous with mosquitoes
And her body was thick with desire.
The sight of the ebony-skinned man
Made beads of sweat appear around her lips.
While her ivory skin flushed bright red.
The breeze of his passing smelled of dust, grass.
She thought over and over about grass
Blowing against her knees and the native
Who was always just out of her reach.
She was there to study birds, rheas and
Ostriches and the 'elephant birds'
As she called them: however like the
Ostriches, the native was faster than her.
His taut legs, covered with sweat, flexed in light
And his mahogany eyes pierced her.
They never spoke a word to each other
The whole time she was in Malawi.
She didn't need to speak to him while she was there.
His presence was pleasurable enough.
Snapped back to the present by a parrot
Flying low and swift by her brunette hair.
She walked outside to the rest of the zoo
And went to look at the zebras, the giraffes
And the other reminders of him.

Take-out

JERE WEST

Clanking, growling, hooting:
Beep, beep, beep!
Hard-hattedimps
Dance attendance on an iron-jawed,
Steel-toothed demon-chef,
Hungry for the taste
Of wood and shingles,
Brick and glass soaked
In the sauce of lives
Shattered for profit.

Great yellow neck stretches
Above the roof-ridge, chooses
Where first to bite:
Shining steel maw drops,
Tears away the first morsel,
Drives through to the heart:
Rending walls, floors, bedrooms, kitchen
Until the meal lays ready,
Smashed and mixed,
Pieces piled in the basement—
A concrete and cinder-block wok.

Steel teeth close, lifting servings
To drop in long rectangular
Dishes on wheels:
Box-lunches for a hungry landfill.

Super-Sized Prayer

MORA FINNERTY

GOD BLESS AMERICA
BIG TATER
3.49

UNITED WE STAND
TRY OUR NEW
SOUTHWEST CHIC SUB

GOD BLESS AMERICA
2 HOT DOGS
CHIPS SM POP 3.50

COME IN AND TRY OUR
CHOC VAN SWIRL
JESUS IS LORD

GOD BLESS AMERICA
A TACO SALAD AND A DRINK
MAKE A GREAT MEAL

FREE MEDIUM POP
WITH SANDWICH PURCHASE
OUR NATION NEEDS PRAYER

GOD BLESS AMERICA
ON A BAGEL
2.95

*In the wake of tragedy,
One thing survives:
A meal and a prayer
Are still less than five.*



