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# Vehicle

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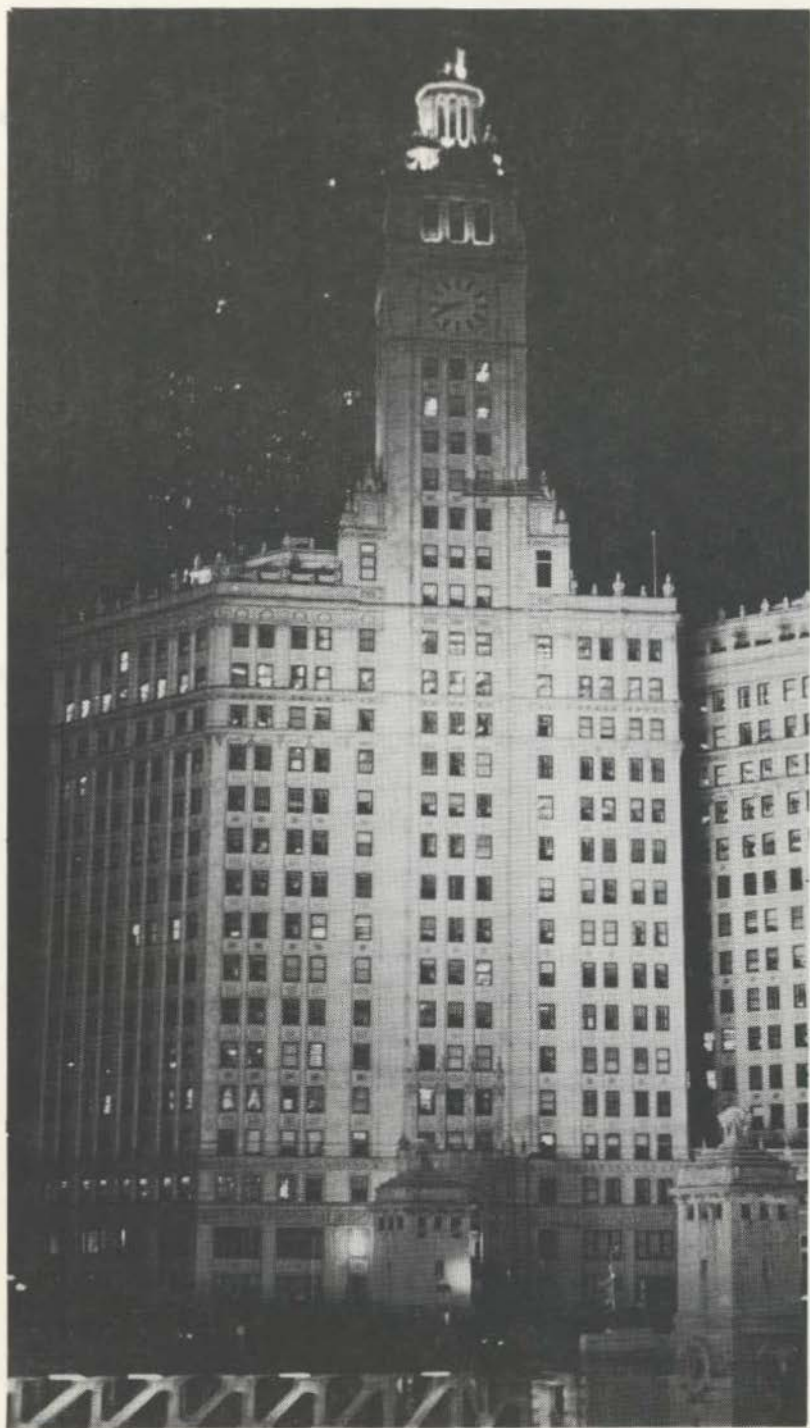
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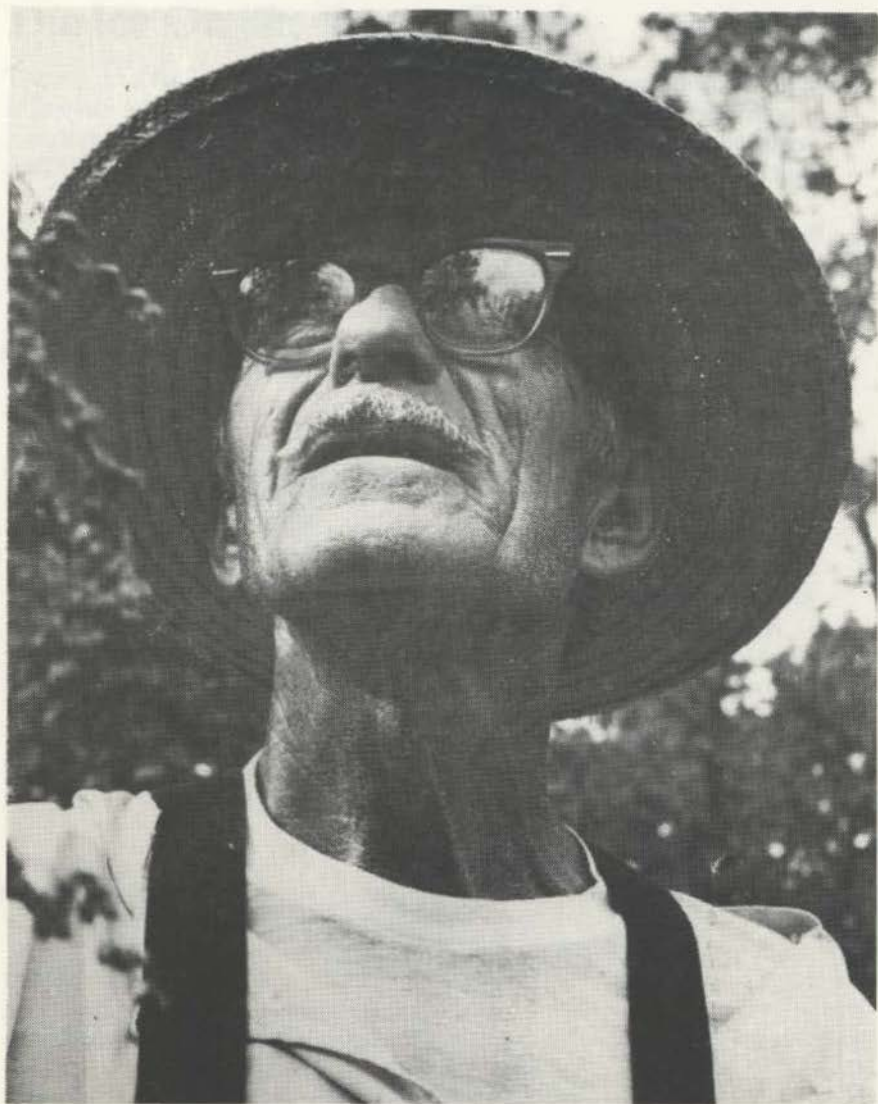
## Old Farmers At The Arcade Cafe

Shake their hands,  
touch the black earth.

The pretty waitress  
with the limp  
fills Petersen's bottomless cup.

Cocking his head,  
he drops a sugar cube  
into the coffee,  
sounding his well.

—John Stockman



—Robin Scholz

## Confetti

Mirthful sprinkling, like a spice;  
Tiny smatters of color  
Tipsy against the sky,  
Touching like a sigh on the pavement.

In the evening  
Reaped  
And swept through rusty gutter teeth  
To rain on Hell.

—Cathy George

## Ode To a Corned Beef Sandwich

Beneath Saint Paul's Cathedral's  
Vaulted marble ceiling,  
Amid the somber groaning of the organ. . .

Mrs. McFarley belched.

A mere burp it wasn't!  
It, like Moses, parted the seas.  
Like Goliath, it rumbled foundations,  
And rustled the hair on the calf of a nun.  
Heads turned to see the culprit,  
Sitting in her pew,  
Picking saurkraut from her bridgework  
Smiling.

—Jeff Bennett



## The Ice On Kirschner's Creek

The ice on Kirschner's Creek  
is smooth and brittle,  
a winter shell to hold the sunfish  
until I swim and fish in summer.

It carries my weight,  
skating under brown willows  
on old Sunday shoes.  
I hurdle a toppled tree,  
fall with a stifled chuckle.

At the beaver dam  
I build a fire  
and smoke my secret cigarette.  
Steam rises from my soles  
as my feet warm by the fire.

—Scott Fishel

## Love Poem to Linda

Lying in the snow,  
arms and legs waving.  
Jumping jack sculptress.

The angel grows,  
the snow bone,  
you, marrow.

We do not speak.  
Moments like this,  
words become blackbirds

heavy with shadows.  
Leaning over,  
I hold out my hand.

—John Stockman

## Grandfather's Portrait

A dead man hangs  
In our French-provincial parlor.  
It chills me to look at him.

Cold grey eyes  
Set in a crack-laden face  
Watch our every move.  
His stern presence reflects  
In our afternoon teas.

His wormwood border—  
Warped with age—  
Accentuates his ashen tone.

Dust settles above him,  
Our lives continue below.  
He stares on—oblivious.

Our posthumous tenant.  
Our tuxedoed ghost.

—James Marsh

## The Massage

In the candle-lit room he lies.  
Amber warmth embraces his motionless form,  
spilling onto the plush carpet  
in delicate waves.  
My shadow glides over his naked back.  
I cross to the bed.

In silence I stand over him.  
My fingers poised; ballerinas waiting in the wings.  
The dance begins.  
Candlelight joins my fingers  
whirling, leaping to unheard music.  
A sensual rhythm.

Fleshy folds ripple under my touch,  
circling fingers, kneading hands.  
Bare skin reddening with heat  
rivaling the candle's flame.

The performance is over.  
He lies still.  
I blow out the candle.

—Kathleen Alaks

## A Driving Force

She was infringing on his territory. Invading his space. His mother's face floated before him, shaking her head silently at these thoughts.

He shook his head and blew her away.

It was his mother's fault he was in this situation anyway. She'd pulled the old "her mother's a friend of my great aunt Lil twice removed—so you just have to give her a ride home" routine.

It was bad enough to have to go home for the weekend. He reviewed the number of parties he could have attended—the girls to pick up and beer to down.

His head throbbed in pained agreement. To make up for missing it all he'd started partying two days earlier.

His head's insistent pounding wasn't being helped any by his passenger's nonstop jabbering. She must be practicing to join the school filibuster team.

She either didn't notice or didn't mind his silence. He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye. Her blond head bobbed and tossed, only the dark roots remaining stable.

Her pink lips pursed as she spoke, the small pink tongue sliding out quickly to wet them to a kissable gleam. She spoke breathily, her admirable chest rising and falling with easy rhythm.

He glanced away to the left. The setting sun threw tomato spots in front of his already smarting eyes.

Another two hours and he'd be home. He didn't know if he could stand it even that long.

The incessant fluttering of her mouth sent pesky swarms of moths buzzing around his ears. He turned up the radio once more, and frightened, they fluttered away.

"Off on your way  
Hit the open road  
There's magic at your fingers  
For the Spirit ever lingers  
Ultimate contact  
In your happy solitude"\*

He hummed the melody to himself. "Happy solitude." He'd be happy if he was solitary right now.

Strange how much he resented the intrusion. But maybe not so strange. He suddenly realized the drive home was more than just a bridge between college and home.

*\*from Rush—Permanent Wave.*

The solitary drive gave him a chance to make the unconscious, yet necessary transformation between the two.

At the beginning of the drive he was cocky and sure of himself and his place in the college society. In his background were women, party life, and very occasionally, homework.

But as he drove down the short-cut highways, drawing ever closer to his humble beginnings, the metamorphosis began. His personality slowly changed until his college ego was subdued and the familiar small town character emerged.

This character was quieter and politer. High-school-good-guy-jock. Mothers liked him as well as daughters.

The college ego tolerated this character, but didn't really care for him.

The transformation wasn't intentional, but unavoidable. And fortunately, reversible. It just as easily reversed itself on the way back to school.

But this time the transformation couldn't become complete. His mind gyrated between the college ego and the small town character, unable to transcend totally from one to the other.

His passenger was oblivious to this inner struggle. She chattered gaily, taking his infrequent grunts and sighs for agreement.

A sudden high note startled him into listening.

"Can you believe he did that?!"

"Huh?"

"Really, I mean, can you believe it?" she persisted.

Small town politeness answered automatically, "What?"

"Like I told you—can you believe Mr. Simmons tried to seduce me in his office? All I did was go in to ask him a simple question about the assignment and he puts the moves on me."

Despite his best intentions, his curiosity was aroused.

"Whadya do?" he mumbled. Don't show too much interest or she'd spill her guts about every event occurring in her life from her first diaper change to her last. . .

"Yeah, he put his hand on my knee." She ignored his question, wrapped up in the drama of relating the sordid encounter.

"Then he kind of slid it upwards, pretending he was just giving me a nice little pat. Lemme tell you, that's the first time anybody gave me "a nice little pat" on the inside of the thigh!"

Her eyes glowed with an inner fervor—but somehow he didn't think it was caused by anger.

"I swear I think all men are alike—they're only interested in one thing!"

Must be football, he mused.

"Since I was just a little thing in lacy underpants, men have been making passes at me."

"The first time was when I was just five years old. I was in kindergarten and we were playing tag. This one little boy chased me behind a tree, knocked me down and pulled my dress over my head."

"If the teacher hadn't come around the corner just then, who knows what would have happened!"

He glanced at her sideways, then back again quickly. She was regarding him coyly, and he suddenly realized the tales weren't being told just so she could hear herself talk, but for his benefit.

"Then just last week I went out to the bars and some asshole tried to pick me up."

He felt a pang of remorse—that "asshole" could have been himself if he weren't going home.

She continued, "Well, I guess maybe he kind of did pick me up because I did let him give me a ride home and asked him in for a beer. But that's all!" she concluded with perfected vehemence.

"First thing I knew he was trying to stick his hand—well it's just too embarrassing to go on—but you get the idea?"

He did.

She sighed, "There just aren't that many nice guys around anymore. Guys who are polite and respect girls."

She threw him a calculatedly inviting glance and smile. This was his cue, and he'd be a fool to ignore it.

The road ahead stretched long and empty, as did that behind. No headlights gleamed through the silent setting dusk.

He slowed the car and stopped, staring straight ahead. Then he turned to her, pushing timidity out the window.

His hand crept slowly toward her, up and over the jean-covered firmness of her thighs. Being careful not to leave any "nice little pats" it continued on until he reached out to grasp the cold steel of the door handle.

It yielded easily to his touch, as did her oh-so-nice body as he maneuvered it skillfully out the door, her protesting shriek falling on deaf ears.

Further down the road, the sun slipped behind the horizon as he took a deep breath and turned off the humming radio.

—Sandy Young

## King Dandelion

On the southern bank of a Pan Am track  
between blistering steel rails and wooden supports  
a golden brilliance draws my eye;  
a little sun amid a sky of grass and cinder  
guards there boldly the weeded mass;  
its head of golden pins  
pushes up towards me to say  
in silence that I'm the trespasser  
and he the ruler of this land.

—Nancy Sieben

## One Afternoon—Contemplating Housecleaning

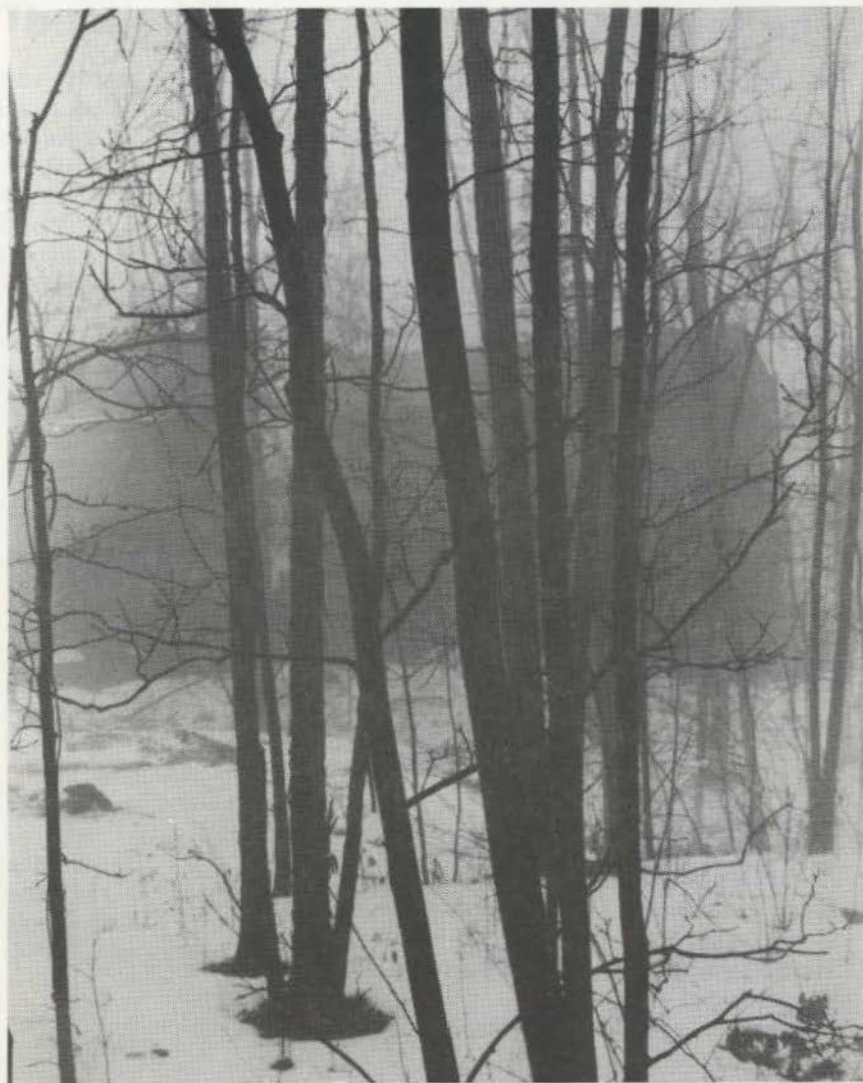
Light shines on  
A piece of paper on the floor  
My windowshades are open  
A shadow  
A small thin slice of yellow paper left over from  
A project which never really mattered  
The window faces Grant street  
The shadow moves  
Wind comes through the window

Should I close the shades  
No one looks in then  
Why would anyone want to look  
And see me sitting on my bed  
Watching a piece of paper  
Blow across the green tile floor  
Trying to figure out what these words  
Written with a blue Scripto pen on college ruled paper mean  
The pen cap has teeth marks on it  
The notebook paper is on the back side because I tried to start  
Something else I couldn't finish  
I should sweep the floor

—Kelli Sander







—Michelle Glassmeyer

## The Sentinel

Coming down the path  
I see the outhouse door  
Wide open:  
My father,  
Pants at his ankles.

From his post,  
Boats float  
Through the trees,  
A girl  
Sleeps in the sand.

He rips paper  
From the roll, wipes  
His binoculars.

—Elise Hempel

## Daddy's Aftershave

Climbing onto the cool bathroom sink,  
The boy reaches for a glass on the shelf.  
He sees a tiny green bottle hidden  
Behind Mommy's makeup.  
Reaching for it, he cups it in his hands,  
And wipes off a layer of dust.  
Slipping, it shatters  
On the yellow tiles.  
The heavy smell of Daddy fills the room.  
"Daddy is that you?"  
He closes his eyes and remembers.  
Daddy hugging him after work,  
His sandpaper cheeks, and smell of smoke.  
A tear rolls down his cheek  
Swallowed in the green river below him.

—Jeff Bennett

## The Wedding

Hey, groom.  
Don't look at me  
too long  
or too funny.  
People will be watching this one.  
If you do  
I'll make you remember—  
I would have laughed  
about the diamond in the ice cube,  
wouldn't have worn aqua eyeshadow to our wedding.  
I would have caught the lint  
on your left jacket sleeve.

—Chris Goerlich

## Untitled

eyes outlined in green and black,  
cheeks blushing tawny pink,  
deep red lips, shiny glossed. . .  
painted face.  
bouncy curls, frosted daintily,  
large gold hoops  
jingling from behind.  
skin-tight Gloria Vanderbilt jeans,  
spike heels,  
and Gucci purse.  
Kodak smile. . .  
20th Century American Clown.

—Carol Hansen

## Treasures in the Yard

Waves of snow withdraw,  
a tide soaked up on frosted beaches;  
treasures stolen by winter  
returned.

A baseball mitt,  
flattened where it fell,  
in the pocket a snowball with seams.  
A weathered sneaker kicked off  
before the last trip  
to the gooseberry bush—  
its mate buried in the closet.

The veteran hoe rusts in the sun,  
edges dulled by sharp winds.  
The cornstalk gardener, flat, matted,  
rests on weeds,  
indifferent to visitors

to the starling's summer bath,  
a lifeless knot of feathers  
still locked in ice.

—Scott Fishel



—Robert Schinagl

## Hitchhiker's Boots

In the musty recess of my closet  
lies a pair of old boots.  
Pulling them out, fine, thick dust stirs. . .  
settles back.  
Once shiny, yellow work boots  
stiff and clean, erect, proud boots  
staring from a window display.  
They smelled of fine leather then.  
Now they smell of sweat and blisters  
damp earth, rotten leather,  
sweet blooms of Arizona cholla,  
tiny orchids and giant spruce—Oregon,  
salty Highway 1 in California,  
cattle and straw—Montana.  
They sit, not forgotten  
hard leather, dry, black, cracked,  
toes scuffed through,  
Vibram soles long worn thin.  
Frayed welts scarcely hold the wisdom  
of road dirt  
heavy on tongue and upper.

—Andy Sudkamp

## The Raffle

He gulped the last drop of Stag from the bottle and glanced at the wall clock, then to his wife. She shifted nervously in her folding chair, and he wondered if she had remembered the ticket. The last light of the day filtered through the greenish glass and dust danced in its beam. Thickly lacquered wooden chairs with "V.F.W. Beckemeyer, Ill." painted across the backs were scattered throughout the hall; some looked like people sitting in groups of their own.

As he picked his teeth, Maureen smoothed her dress again.

"I don't know why in hell you're so jumpy tonight," he said. "You got the ticket don't ya?"

"Course I got it. I'm just about to bust waiting to find out who the winner is. Only a limited number were sold — we got a pretty good chance," she said.

"Just as good as everybody else in this place." He got up from his chair and crushed his cigarette out in the mashed potatoes and gravy half-mound on his paper plate. "I need another beer," he said.

The afternoon air was heavy with fried chicken grease and coffee. Two children wiggled by him, almost knocking him into a large woman. She was balancing a full plate of food, a cup of coffee and a slab of chocolate cake in both hands and was trying to weave her way back to her seat in the corner.

"'Scuse me, Margaret. You know how kids get when they're cooped up inside," he apologized.

She got a better grip on her plate and smiled. "That's o.k. Say, you and Maureen got it all figured out what you'll do if you win?"

They walked toward the bar and it occurred to him that he hadn't really thought about it. Winning six thousand dollars would be too good to imagine. "Nope. Never been too lucky. See ya, Margaret. Good luck."

"Same to you. Oh, tell Maureen I'm done puttin' up what's left of the garden. I'll be by sometime this week with green beans and tomatoes..."

He leaned against the green Formica top of the bar and traced a circle with his finger around one of the faded gold stars in the cracked plastic. He tilted another beer and wondered. All that money. In one night—in one split second—I could win half as much as I make in a whole year at that damn garage, he thought. He set the beer down on the bar and caught a glimpse of his hands. He looked at them, turning each one

from palm to top. "My hands are never clean," he said to himself. Years of axle grease had wedged into tiny cracks and lines in his skin. He rubbed his large palms together and felt the dry skin heat up. Then he felt the bartender's eyes on him and stopped.

"Nervous?" the bartender asked.

"Wha...? Oh, yeah. A little, Bob," he said. He took another drink. Better go sit down, he thought. Maureen's probably wonderin' if I fell in.

He headed for his seat, stopping to say hello or to talk with a few of his neighbors and some guys from the garage. Finally get to sit down, he thought, as he pulled his chair back from the table. His plate of food was gone. He looked around for an ashtray, and spotted one underneath a used paper napkin. Maureen had her back to him and was talking to the doctor's wife.

"...Too bad we bought only one chance, Lois. Cy's girls sold us ours. Ten dollars apiece! But we sure could use that prize money if we see fit to win. Pay bills and get that old water heater of ours fixed and maybe..." Her voice became a hum in his ears.

No doubt we could use the money, he thought. But I bet I'd get a helluva deal outta Lou for that john boat up to his place. I could take him down for a couple hundred. He remembered the time he went fishing in Missouri with the guys at the garage. Getting up before the sun did, going down by the lake's edge to breathe the clear, cool morning air. . .what a great week. He hated seeing it end.

Nearly everyone was done eating now and was seated at the long tables, some drinking coffee, others beer as they talked. I bet they're all wondering what to do if they get lucky tonight, he thought. Dishes and silverware clanked, and an occasional uproar was heard as someone told a joke.

Maybe Maureen and me could even go on a vacation. He imagined himself on the beach, listening to the waves pounding into the sand. He was drinking something in a tall, cool glass while watching girls stroll by in scant bikinis, their sun-bleached hair blowing in the warm wind and water glistening on tan skin. . .

"Can I have your attention please." A short man clutching a twisted white handkerchief was standing on stage next to a whirring microphone. As he spoke, he stood too close, making it hiss and spit his magnified words out angrily. It stood four or five inches taller than he, and he wrestled around until he finally adjusted it. He mopped his forehead and then ran the cloth over his bald head.

"Please, folks! Ladies, gentlemen! Testing! Testing? One, two, three!" The microphone squeaked and whirred.

Maureen saw her husband jump at the man's words and then turn his head toward the stage. She wondered for a moment why he had such a peculiar grin on his face, but blamed it on too many Stags.

The crowd slowly began to quiet itself. He could hear Carl from the garage, finishing another joke, his wife urging him to quiet down. Lois was pulling her youngest child out from under the table, threatening to take him outside if he didn't hush up. He felt the excitement building in



the hall. It reminded him of Tuesday nights at the Starlite Lounge when he held an exceptionally good hand. He and all the boys from the garage, plus any extras who could get away from the house for a night, would sit at the big round table in the corner under the rotating "Pabst Blue Ribbon The Beer that Made Milwaukee Famous" sign. As they tossed chips to the center of the table, each watched the other's eyes. But he never gave in to a poker face.

"Honey, pray he calls number 911!" Maureen whispered, and crossed her fingers on her lap.

His palms were sweating slightly, and he wiped them on his pants. He looked at Maureen, at how straight she sat, at the way her eyes, never moving, watched the man on stage and wondered if he looked as crazy. Taking a drink of beer, he pushed his chair back from the table.

"It's gettin' hotter 'n hell in here," he mumbled.

"Are you leaving, hon? They didn't even say who. . ."

"Hang on, Maureen. For Chrissakes I just scooted my chair back," he said through clenched teeth.

"Oh. Sorry. I didn't want you to miss the winner," she said quietly.

"Grab them matches Maureen, please? Sorry, didn't mean to yell at ya." He lit a cigarette, inhaling deeply. The exhaled smoke formed a cloud over their heads.

The microphone wheezed and coughed as the short man blurted out his introduction. "Sorry 'bout the sound we got tonight folks, but ya know this here ain't exactly the Miss America pageant, and you sure as hell know I ain't Bert Parks!" He mopped his brow and bald head and pointed to a young girl at his side. She looked shyly at the audience and giggled at a tall boy at the front table.

"You all know Lucinda here – she's the gal who's gonna draw the lucky ticket from the barrel. All your names are in there somewhere. She's gonna pick three cards – the first is the winner of \$150 dollars cash, second is \$300 cash, and the third card will be the grand prize winner of \$6,000!" The girl stood by a barrel made of wire mesh and slowly began turning the wooden crank on its side.

Maureen turned to her husband. "Honey, wonder if she can read the writing on them cards. Reckon she can pick who she wants?"

He watched as the barrel spun; the tickets looked like socks spinning around in a laundromat dryer. The short man continued to talk but the only sound he heard was the buzzing in his ears. Maureen turned back to the stage.

The girl stuck her arm inside the small hinged door on the barrel and drew out the first card.

—Laura Henry

## A Walk At Night

Stars, twinkling diamonds  
on a backdrop of  
deep-blue felt.  
Wind whipping frayed edges  
of my forest-green wool scarf.  
Engine roars by,  
like an angry lion  
teased by a tamer.  
In the apartment house  
across the street,  
yellow lights flicker off,  
one by one.  
A maple's shivering,  
naked branches  
dance in the moonlight.  
Jamming my hands  
deep into my pockets,  
I head for home,  
the echo of my own footsteps  
pounding in my ears.

—Judi Jines

## Morning in the Dump

The golden sun rolls over the hillside,  
Entrapping itself for a moment  
In a drop of dew teetering  
From a jutting fender.  
Steam rises like mist on legendary moors,  
And spreads its fingers into valleys of tin.  
Catching the now orange rays,  
Prisms of glass glow in their beds of earth.  
The sparrow sings atop its porcelain perch  
Amid the sweet smell of rust.

—Jeff Bennett

## In Praise of Chocolate Ice Cream

—for Carman Hall

I know the muscle of a frozen gallon,  
a chocolate brick.  
I know the music of soft scoops.

They don't think I hear the low talk.  
They don't think I notice them  
hurrying their children away.

Dipping darkly, the girl at 31 Flavors  
says I have no imagination.  
"The only ice cream is chocolate ice cream."

I have dreamed my priest  
praising Lenten sacrifice;  
have seen blinds drawn in back rooms,  
clean-shaven men and fair women  
devouring the dusky delicacy.

I have seen the bride and groom  
swallowing the thoughtful gift.

I have dreamed the leaders,  
elbows on a round table,  
gulping smooth ice cream.

And as I spoon this bowl  
of dark ice cream, sweet and cold,  
the light in the room softly grows.

—John Stockman

## Summer on the Isle of Palms

We wait for low tide.  
Revealing  
Bits of shells,  
Stones, patches of seaweed,  
And driftwood cracked  
From salt.  
We wade  
Through the shallow water,  
Sidestepping holes—  
"Watch out for crabs!"  
We feel for sand dollars  
With our feet.  
Toes probing the muck.  
Gently,  
    or they break.  
Some are old  
    and smooth.  
Others are alive—  
startling  
    and prickly.

—Elisabeth Crist

## Morning in the Dump

The ground was hard and black  
Under a pale, overcast sky  
In a world of dead worms  
From a pile of rot  
And the stench of things that  
    were once alive  
    and now were not  
    and the stench of things that  
    were once alive  
    and now were not

## The Wave

Incoming—  
Foamy white manes,  
swift against the spray,  
the turmoil,  
of churning legs below,  
rise. . .and  
Leap! above golden sand,  
glistening shell and pebble,  
poised. . .  
Reins of water,  
transparent steeds,  
break! against the shore.

—Herbert S. Demmin\*

## Remembering

Between the yellowed plastic pages  
I find them hiding,  
Memories of lazy summers,  
The ocean playing like a stuck record,  
Breezes with a salty aftertaste.

The faded seagulls cry,  
Calling me back to be King  
From my castles of sand  
Once more.

—John Kleinsteinber

## Potato

1

With this stone,  
Cain slew Abel.

With blood and bone,  
the stone grew eyes  
and multiplied.

2

Ripping the skin,  
gouging its eyes,  
I think of my grandmother

who said,  
for plenty of eyes,  
plant on a starry night.

Who said,  
write your enemy's name  
on a strip of paper,

stick it to a potato  
with as many pins  
as possible.

The next full moon,  
he will die  
in twisted pain.

Earth apple,  
 forbidden fruit,  
 to eat you is sin,  
 but the Irish sprinkle holy water  
 and plant on Good Friday.

Underground,  
 mixing His blood  
 and the dust of those returned,  
 you birth your children.

—John Stockman

## Late Show

Mommy has a new lampshade hat  
the dangling tassels are her braids.  
Daddy's tie is pretending  
to be a chief's headdress  
He is a brave Indian.  
They dance close  
to no music  
tripping over Mommy's shoe  
on its side  
in the middle of the floor.  
Falling down together,  
they laugh  
ears to the ground  
listening for ponies.

—Chris Goerlich



## Love in Him—Joe

"I'll kill the bastards," my father said, slamming down the black telephone receiver.

"Oh, Dad would you just calm down," I told him.

But he did not hear me. The wrinkles of his red face had become more visible and he now looked older than his sixty years. He lifted his large frame from the kitchen chair as if every movement was painful. With his back bent, he walked stiffly to the large black recliner in the living room. He sat silent in the leather chair, his head down to conceal the tears in his eyes. With large, rough hands he rubbed his bald head.

My mother and I followed him into the living room. We sat on the couch across from him, waiting for his anger to explode.

Then my mother turned to me, "I just can't understand why he can't give us an address," she said, rubbing the back of her neck with small, delicate hands.

"What do you mean?" my father shouted. "That damn group won't let him. It's been almost two years since he left and we haven't seen him since last Christmas. I guess they're his family now. He sure as hell doesn't care about this one. Those goddamned Jesus freaks."

"If we just knew how to get in touch with him," my mother said. "If something went wrong, well we couldn't even let him know."

"At least he called," I said.

"Called, hell, we could all die tomorrow and he wouldn't even find out in time for the funeral. Maybe he just doesn't care."

An uneasy silence crept over us. Only the soft Christmas carols playing on the stereo could be heard. Those songs only made me feel worse. We were wrapped in a tension I could not bear. Nervously, I fumbled for something to say. I turned to my father, "But, Dad, did he say anything about coming home tonight, at least for Christmas Eve?"

My father took a deep breath and keeping his head down and his hands on his forehead he mumbled, "He said he'd try."

"Then it's not totally hopeless, huh?"

My father did not answer but remained motionless. My mother got up and walked into the kitchen.

I glanced around the room at the holiday decorations. Our Christmas tree was a large scotch pine, now surrounded by mounts of brightly colored gifts. The fireplace was adorned with holly placed above the four hanging, red stockings. And above my father's chair was my contribution to the holiday season, a Christmas needlepoint of brightly

colored yarn spelling out, "Joy." Using every stitch I knew, and almost every color of yarn, I had created a stitchery of holiday spirit. But right now it made me feel uncomfortable, so I walked to the kitchen.

My mother was sorting through old cards and letters, throwing the unneeded ones aside until she finally found what she had been looking for. She left the mass of cards on the table and walked to the other side of the room. She began rearranging the cards she had taped to the wall in the shape of a Christmas tree.

"Mother, what are you doing?" I said removing a red, Santa-shaped cookie from the counter.

"Oh, I'm just rearranging these cards. I don't really like it this way, anyhow." She stood under her traditional Christmas decoration, a display of cards. I watched her stretch her tiny body trying to reach the cards at the top.

"I thought it looked fine before, Mom." I bit off Santa's head and walked toward her.

She took the card from her hand and struggled to place it high on the tree of cards. "Here, I'll get it." I reached up to grab a drab looking card and examined it more closely. It was faded and tattered, a little larger than an index card. I put down the beheaded Santa cookie and opened the pathetic looking card. No clever little saying was inside. It simply read, "Thinking of you." It was signed, " 'Love in Him—Joe.' " I recognized the card as one we'd received almost a year and one half ago.

"What do you want this up for? It's not even a Christmas card. Besides, it's tacky looking."

"Sandra, it's the thought behind the card," she defended.

" 'Love in Him—Joe.' " that sure took a whole lot of thought," I whispered to myself. Finally giving in to my mother's wishes, I reached up and taped the card to the upper section of the tree of cards where it would be noticed by all.

Mother stood back and smiled, happy with her arrangement. Her green eyes glowed now, seeing the little card amongst the others.

It was obvious that the feeble card still held as much importance as it had the day we received it. I remembered the look on her face that August day. She'd shown it to me as soon as I walked in the door.

"We got a card from Joe today," she had blurted. With a large smile she'd handed me the discolored envelope. There was no return address, just a Michigan postmark. Inside the card was the simple inscription, four little words that held so much more meaning to my parents than one thousand words from me. It was that tiny card that now held the star position on my mother's tree of cards.

"Well Mom, are you done with your rearranging now?" I asked grabbing my half-eaten Santa.

"Yes, I think that's better now." She walked back to the table and began to straighten the pile of letters and greeting cards she'd gone through.

"I guess it's nice," I said looking at my mother's work, "but I still don't

understand why you want a plain card with a bunch of Christmas cards."

"Well when Joe comes, I think he'll be very happy to see his card."

"When Joe comes?"

"Yes. He'll be home for Christmas, just like all of our family."

"Oh, Mother, I hope he does come home for your sake and Dad's. But I wouldn't get your hopes up too much."

"He'll be here."

"And what if he doesn't come?" I snapped. "Then what? You'll keep right on thinking that he'll be back."

My mother looked at me, stunned.

"It's about time you and Dad got realistic about this situation. You keep thinking he'll come back and when he doesn't, you're hurt. If he ever does come back, who knows what'll happen. Maybe he'll stay for a few hours. Maybe even a day. Then he'll leave. He'll go back to the group."

My mother was silent. She looked downward and rubbed her temples with her tiny hands. Her large, green eyes looked tired and sad.

"Oh, Mom, I'm sorry. You're right. Maybe he'll come. Here, I'll take those cards."

She handed me the stack, and I put the rest back into the cupboard. Just then the kitchen door flung open and in trotted my two little nephews.

"Well, hello there. How are you two today?" my mother asked. Her face glowed with pride as she spoke to her grandchildren. Quickly she went to my sister and her husband. "Oh Beth, Joe called. He might be able to make it for Christmas. Looks like the whole family will be together this year."

As Christmas Eve went on, more family arrived. Soon everyone but Joe had made it to the house. After a late Christmas Eve dinner, the family retired to the livingroom, where we sat around talking and laughing. My father did not participate, though. He sat in the black recliner, quietly smoking the fat brown cigar. We reminisced about past Christmases. We tried to act as if this were like any other Christmas, but everyone could feel the tension.

At 9:45 we heard a knock at the door. My father jumped, dropping his cigar to his shirt.

"Damn it," he said, quickly brushing dark grey ashes from his shirt. My mother threw a glance at him. She was unable to move. We kids knew what they were hoping. Dad got up and went to the entryway. Taking a large breath, he reached for the knob on the heavy brown door. That door had never been opened this cautiously before. I looked at my brothers and sisters. They seemed as nervous as I felt. Slowly, my father opened the door.

"Merry Christmas, you old fool, you."

The anticipation on my father's face had turned to sad disappointment as our neighbor, Arnie, staggered in. Arnie held tightly to the thick wooden cane, stopping only to greet my mother. "Merry Christmas, Martha," he said to my Mom

"Merry Christmas, Arnie," she said quietly.

"Have a drink, Ray?" Arnie asked shoving the half empty bottle of whiskey into my father's hands.

Taking the bottle from Arnie's quivering hands, my father walked to the cupboard and grabbed a pair of glasses. Arnie slowly lowered his large body to the chair, propping his cane beside him.

"Isn't Martha having any?" Arnie asked.

"No thanks, Arnie. I've got my egg nog in the other room." She began walking back toward the living room.

"Wait, wait," Arnie started, "Don't I even get a little Christmas kiss?"

"Merry Christmas, Arnie." My mother walked over and kissed him softly on the cheek, and then left the room.

There was a brief silence between the two men as they sipped their drinks. That silence was broken by the twelve church bells announcing that Christmas was here.

"Well, Ray, Merry Christmas; health and happiness to you and your family." Arnie lifted his drink and gestured to my father.

"To you too, Arnie," my father reciprocated.

As the sun rose, so did my nephews and nieces, eager to see what Santa had left them. They ran around the room, dodging already opened gifts, and looking for more surprises. The Christmas stockings were snatched from their hooks on the fireplace, and surprisingly enough the holly remained undisturbed. The joy needlepoint above my father's chair seemed more meaningful today, as I watched my sister's children enjoy the holiday.

What had started as brightly colored packages, had now become a mass of opened boxes and crumpled paper. But on one side of the tree stood three gifts that remained intact. They were Joe's gifts, and they fascinated my nephew who was now giving them his undivided attention. He toddled over to the tree, his chubby little hands reaching for the kelly-green ribbon that adorned the outside of the largest package.

"Hey, hey, get outa there!" boomed my father's voice. The little boy jumped back, frightened by the loud voice. His bright blue eyes were opened wide in fear, and tears began to stream down his full pink cheeks.

"My God, Dad. What did you have to scare him for?" I asked as I went to comfort the little boy.

"The damned little shit. He shouldn't be over there anyway. They aren't his presents."

"Well, how's he supposed to know that? Do you think he's going to read, 'To: Joe, From: Mom and Dad'? He's only two."

With his face red, and his forehead wrinkled in anger, my father stood looking down at me. "Now don't get smart with me, girl."

"Oh, brother. You have no patience." I took my nephew's hand and led him away from the Christmas tree. We then sat down to play.

I heard my mother at the other side of the room, "What's the matter with you? You used to have so much patience with your grandchildren."

"They're spoiled and you know it," my father answered her.

"Well, they're only children. I suppose I should have put Joe's gifts away, anyway."

"Hey, maybe Scott could wear the shirt I bought for Joe."

"Sandra," my mother said shocked.

"Mom, I was only kidding. Talk about touchy."

She looked back at my Dad. "Well I'll just put them in the bedroom. They'll still be around if Joe comes home."

"No," my father commanded, "they'll stay under the tree, so when he comes, he'll know that he hasn't been forgotten.

—Debra Klinnert

## Shoe

Leather lips  
encircle my ankle,  
sucking in my foot  
at dawn.

Tongue licks my toes  
as steely eyes—  
bound by cotton cords—  
stare at the sky,  
content with a gullet  
full of heel and sole.

I feel the toothless mouth  
gnawing as I walk about.  
At night  
it spits its dinner out.

—Scott Fishel

## The Drinker

Dust wanders  
in pale streaks of sunlight  
while you,  
    bodiless in morning,  
pace through loyal cupboards  
    of box-smells,  
suicide—bright dove  
perched quietly on your pale shoulder.

...Your hands,  
blue with veins,  
embrace a coffee stained cup.  
Old words form new—  
beginningly; white steam  
    swirls memories and  
bits of dark pain.

Yesterday's white night, one  
suddenly quiet moment you saw angels,  
    hovering-still,  
and glasses glowing in their reflection.  
Your eyes snapped away from the scene:  
yellowed faces shadowed  
like skulls above the shine.

Now all is pumped back,  
on that first sip, and burns,  
silently,  
in the ball of your throat.

—Bob Hunt

## **The Widow**

Who would look at this face,  
Without seeing sadness  
Painted on like fashion.  
Wrinkles drawn,  
By the old-age artist.

I have seen agony masks  
In basements of museums,  
Geometrical in shapes,  
Designed to portray Life.

—George Ndu-Igbudu

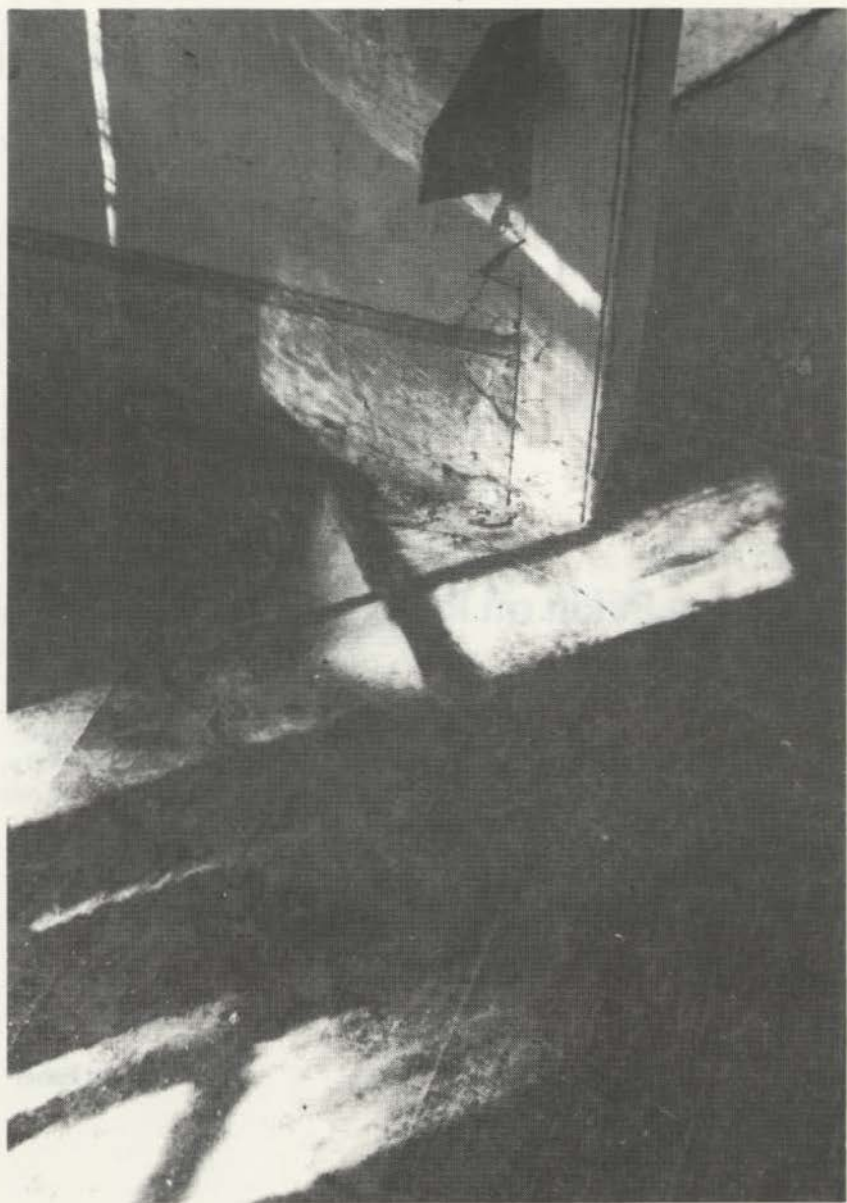
## **Electricity (Entering Peking on Rt. 9)**

Listless gray towers  
march up from the horizon  
Like soldiers  
bound for a war with Darkness.

Outstretched arms  
grasp black veins,  
thick and heavy,  
coursing with brilliant power  
to feed a thousand homes.

With a switch  
the soldiers bleed,  
filling rooms with warm light.

—Scott Fishel





## Hatchet Jack

A blizzard howled like some terrible animal wracked with pain the day we received the news of the murders. Apparently, some poor soul had gone mad during the week-long snowstorm and took an axe to a bunch of trappers. It was a terrible sight. The mangled bodies were frozen stiff in icy red patches of blood, the fire having died out sometime two days earlier, turning the room into a gruesome meat locker of sorts. I just wanted to shut those stricken glassy eyes. The faces of the victims were contorted into frozen masks of pain above their hoar-frosted and grizzled beards.

I could well imagine the scene before the carnage. A fire in the smoke-blackened Franklin stove throbbled yellow and red, biting into the thawing cedar logs and forcing the winter-thickened sap to ooze and spit and sizzle while around a rough, wood-hewn table three or four men clutched soiled and bent fans of poker cards. They leaned forward on their thread-bare, wool-clad elbows concentrating so hard on hearts and diamonds and spades and clubs that they couldn't hear death outside, shrieking in the blue wind like a banshee escaped from the darkest pit in Hell.

One man sat apart from them. He was a man who had never been able to sing quietly in his head, remembering how the tundra will again push up trembling green mosses come springtime. No, this man heard that banshee's screams outside. Its maddening wail jabbed into his mind viciously and raked one long, pointed fingernail across his brain to loosen his sanity. This man's eyes, which should have been clear, were flecked with shards of eerie yellow. His muscles constricted and his skin prickled with a sweat that was at once both cold and hot. Then that banshee's nail dug in again, and this time his agonized soul broke down. He added his own hellish sobs and screams to those of the storm as he grabbed the axe hung by a rawhide cord pierced through its handle; and the horrified trappers pushing frantically away from the table, upsetting cards and a washpan full of soiled dishes, could not escape the madman or the sickening whump of the axe biting into their flesh and tearing apart their bodies in ragged hunks. It made me shudder to contemplate the human carnage frozen stiff in that cabin.

Sometimes the ice demons unleashed in the north drive a man to insanity like that. These men just sit watching the blizzard outside and listening to the screeching wind until something snaps inside of them. I'm a trapper myself, and there have been times when I've been jittery during a particularly long spell of bad weather. That's when it's important to keep from going crazy by reading a book, playing solitaire,

or just taking a long draw on a bottle of whiskey. If a man can't keep himself collected, he's doomed.

The sheriff, a sturdy little Swede, had determined from others at the outpost that the murderer was most likely a wild-eyed man originally from San Francisco who had set off to trap some months ago. I believe they said his name was Jack Morely, but pretty soon he was being called simply Hatchet Jack. Sitting by stoves, clutching white stoneware mugs of coffee laced with heartening whiskey, we pieced together as much about Hatchet Jack as we could. I recalled seeing him a few times when he had furs to exchange for a grubstake and a few drygoods. He wasn't a big man, and he couldn't have been much over thirty-five. His body had the slim-boned ranginess of a predator; his face was lean and feral in its sharpness, the angle of his jaw furred over with a wolfish beard. Hatchet Jack wasn't the type of man to warm up to anyone even if he got drunk. Instead, he'd hunch his shoulders, staring grim-lipped, ready to lash out at any boozed-up carouser who guffawed within striking distance. Consequently, he didn't have any friends. The fact that he was with these other trappers during the storm was just a coincidence.

The sheriff had put together a few supplies and went off with his young deputy to apprehend Hatchet Jack. The only place the madman could have gone was an abandoned cabin at Cragg's Point, unless he simply ran into the storm and froze to death.

From what I understand they found Hatchet Jack at the cabin. After that the story gets a little confused. I guess the sheriff figured he didn't have enough supplies to get the three of them back to the outpost in case of a bad snowstorm springing up. So instead he left the young deputy to watch the now calm Hatchet Jack. Before leaving, the sheriff warned his deputy not to untie Hatchet Jack no matter how lucid he seemed. The deputy must not have listened too closely because when the sheriff returned the next evening, it was to find the hacked-up body of his deputy minus one Hatchet Jack. Actually, it's not too surprising that the deputy didn't follow the sheriff's instructions. The hypnotic gleam in Hatchet Jack's eyes must have been unbearable. The quiet in the cabin must have frayed the deputy's nerves until he couldn't resist Hatchet Jack's request to have the gnawing cords loosened a bit about his wrists.

Here comes the part of the story that's the hardest to believe.

Forty years passed, and nothing was heard of Hatchet Jack. As long as he didn't appear and cause an eruption of murders, no one really cared if news of Hatchet Jack ever turned up. Having the wilderness swallow him up was pretty satisfactory to everybody. Then one winter a fellow trapper named Sam Gellar and I decided to stop at this abandoned cabin tucked away about seven miles from a bend in the main river. We could only stare open-mouthed at what we saw inside. At a crude wooden table sat a man frozen to death. He must have run out of fuel and not thought to chop up the table. In front of him was slip of paper with almost illegible handwriting. When I finally made out what it said, I swallowed hard. Upon it was simply scrawled, "I am Hatchet Jack."

**-B.L. Davidson**

## Walking Home Late

November.  
The blind wind,  
fingers on my face.  
In the night's deep lake  
stars like minnows.

Mr. Swengel's yard  
is a kitchen of women.  
That bent oak,  
my grandmother  
rattling forks.

—John Stockman

## November

The cold wind whistles  
through cracks in  
the windowpane,  
its gusts beat at the  
shivering glass.

I clasp my knees,  
pull my legs tightly to my chest,  
gaze outside.  
The grass bends, the swing rocks, a  
few remaining leaves soar from  
the swaying trees.

I shudder.  
I am the wind's captive.

—Cindy Hubbart

## On the Bus

on the bus  
cold December darkness,  
the window seat is mine.

night sky melts into mountains,  
the frost-crusted pane  
fogs at each breath.

car lights trail past  
swift, like night owls.

pine trees, darker than night,  
cover the valley like a wool scarf.

and the bus runs after dawn.

—Laura Henry

## Haiku

The willows call me  
With their beckoning branches  
To cool, restful shade

The goldenrod sways;  
Soft, melancholy whispers  
Remind of God's gifts

—James Marsh

## Spillway

Frothy water churns  
kaleidoscopic trout  
to whirlpools whipping.

—Gloria Rhoads



—Robert Schinagl

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