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Archives

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Vehicle

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The Vehicle

Spring 2000 vol. 41 no. 2

Editor

Catherine Eilers

Associate Editor

Tara Coburn

Editorial Adviser

Gregg Hecimovich

Reading Staff

Kristi Brownfield

John Cagle

Courtney Cox

Lisa DeGross

Heather Delabre

Wendy Lehman

Stephanie Schwaninger

Jason Sperb

Sarah Windau

Cover Art

Lisa Sarm

Layout Coordinator

Nicole Meinheit

Student Publications Adviser

John David Reed

Printing Adviser

Wilburn Hutson

Produced by Sigma Tau Delta

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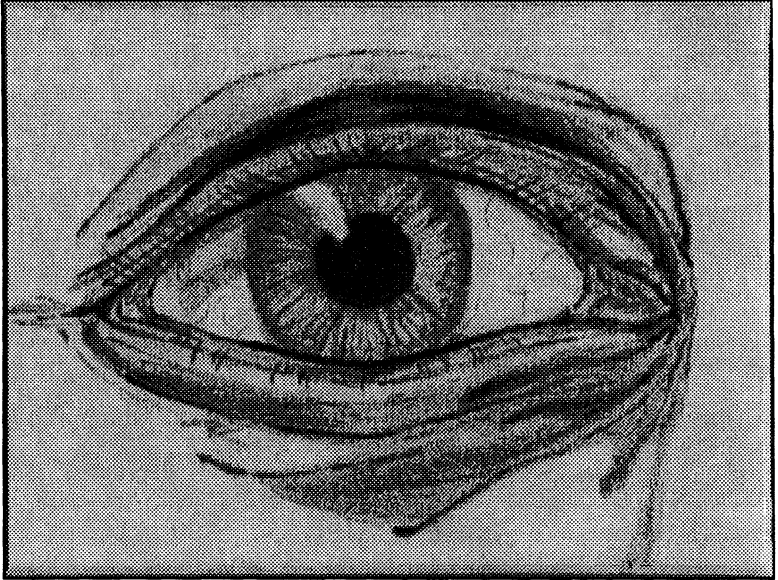
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Untitled

—by matthew a. thomas—



Fred's Pen

—by autumn williams—

Sometimes,
I miss the smell of hog manure
that hung heavy on the farm
that could break into sleep
like the steady alarm of morning.

The pigs rooting at their stations:
Hell—east, Heaven—south,
Fred's pen the northern border.
The steel hut he built
as Father's hired-hand
before becoming a man
cramped by family and house.

After eight years,
a landmark—disassembled
by hammer, drill, and torch.
Even Fred came conducting
oxygen and acetylene
searing appendages apart—
Broken arms, kneeless legs,
a spine in smithereens.

In the bottom lands,
Crooked Creek rusts.
Piled steel streaming brown—
An amputated boar's tusk,
organic underground.

tomatoes

— by dave moutray —

thirty odd Kodak glossy prints
of times that were
and lives that came and went
a mind bent on remembering
for the sake of recalling
the words of speechless faces
gracing pictures that lend nothing
to who they were
so i'm wondering where the hamster cages
and dog leashes have gone
who's driving the '84 dirty grey Escort
and is that house on Lulu still there?

six rows of red and green tomatoes
neatly planted and cultivated
smooth in texture
juicy in taste
but utterly useless
when captured on photos
reminders, though
of one man determined
to put out the finest on the block
yet forgetting the fruit of his efforts
in the confine of his own home
the one with his green eyes
and sunken cheeks

AFRICA

by businge roger godfrey

Although she fed me fruit and bitter herbs,
And infested into my belly parasites and worms,
stealing my health, I will confess I love
This primitive heaven that tests my youth
My blood is full of her vigor and beauty
Giving me strength upright against her hate
Her bigness floods my being like a storm.
Yet as a hunter fronts an elephant in the wilderness,
I stand within her walls with not a shred
of terror, malice, not a word of scorn.
Darkly I gaze into the jungle ahead.
And see her might and granite wonders there.
 Beneath the touch of memory's unerring hand.
 Like green priceless woods, rising in the forest.

seeking Out

—by kim hunter—

Count to a hundred, I'll hide, You find me
one

two

three

I am the Emperor with her new clothes, no—
a woman wrapped in yards of gauze to be seen.
There is blood on my fingers from gnawing
gnawing at the edges:

You gnaw at my edges, too.

Forty-one

forty-twothreefourfive

I run and run and run.

I am naked Venus, wrapped in tapestries by the Crusades—
wrapped in fold after fold of tapestry by myself

(unravel me.)

If a watched pot never boils, why do I roll inside with
spit and bile foaming to my surface as You watch on?

no more no more no more metaphors
gender specific non specific non gender specific pronouns
I mean what I say and I say what I mean as I
slam my hand (seventy) against the fluttering moths
smashing them against the wall (one) of my house
crushing their wings to dust (two).

Lead me not, lead me not, lead me not into darkness
but deliver me into light.

My lover, she is.

and I rage inside all of the abstractions to get
out.

Ninety-eight, ninety-nine.

Go.

Razorblade, Crystal I.

by jason brown

I devoted my methodical soul to a razorblade, I pet-named Crystal.

She is the metal.
I am the mirror.

OnE sTrAlgHt LiNe aT A tImE

She tickles the strings
Her fist in my ass.
I mime. My mouth jars
Open. Nostrils flared.

She is the rock.
I am the glass.

OnE sTrAlgHt lInE at A tImE

She is the clever angle
Slicing open my tongue.
I am the beggar, licking
residue off her acute lips.
Spitting blood. Careless.

I am the bag of excuses.
She is the answer to use.

Untitled

— by megan guernsey —

I thought the moon was an egg in the sky,
so I brought it down to my table.
I picked off its shell,
bit by bit, piece by piece.
Don't worry, I was careful.
But something was alive in there.
A chicken, I think,
blinking at me with wet, bulging eyes.
So I hit its head with a hammer.
Its tail, its face,
smashed flat on my table.
And I hit its heart.
Again.
Again.
Again against its chickeny heart,
but it would not flatten.
It will not flatten.
It beats.
I hit.
I hit.
It beats.
And the moon has been full for weeks.

Coyote

by autumn williams

Rain slightly falling,
In the middle of October,
howls a coyote's anger
hears its own teeth gnawing

rips, in two, its leg
escapes the hunter's trap.
In the middle of October,
sleeping Mother's anger—

a bed of rain and glass.
Drifting in the gutter,
sky—her face
stained blue. Dead leaves

scrape the corners
of her smile drained
stale and dull.
In the middle of October,

Mother bit the doctor's hand
who touched to fix her skull.
Father with his hammer
nailed the cracked encasing

sealed shut the bony gash.
Now, my mother quaking
in an ivory closet,
the one that Father built.

Coyote continued

In the middle of October,
Fur
Mud-matted
Blood—

Coyote losing,
faster, ground—
Coyote willing
run

Baptized

by stephanie carpenter

Is there a Sparkle that fades
When I put the Water on your cheeks?

You don't use your sleeve to dry
The Hot Air turns Cool on them.

Brother

by tara coburn

Your smile looked the same
when you found Jesus
as when you played the guitar
Bare arms holding the music up in the air
Letting your voice twist around the notes
swirling in smoke

I don't smile
when your fingers pluck the strings so sweetly
like puppy-dog tails
All I can see is the royal purple scars
perched on your chest
Nightcrawlers squatting
Your hate for yourself ground into the muscle of your arm
like dirtbike trails on the mountainside
Jesus couldn't press that knotted skin
back smooth into your flesh
Smooth like the water you say he walked on

Almost a man
in your snarl as you floor the gas
in the gentle way you rest your hand on my shoulder
not a sweet-toothed child
Seeing bentwaisted over your songs
in boxer shorts
I wonder if someday you'll be telling your newborn babies
about the bloodcrusted razor blade
you left on my bedroom carpet
the few aspirin left after you downed the bottle
or about the time you slept as
I held my finger like a popgun and
traced "Jesus Saves"
over the welted scars on your bicep

My 1984

by dave moutray

the bell tower chimed in
the year 1984
my windy city pilgrimage
sent chills through my eyes
as I wandered to and fro
on Waverly and then 5th
chased by a naked lady
who insisted that Big Brother
was on our trail
a Great Lake was the only thing
that broke up the grey buildings
that enclosed and enveloped

china dolls jumped kamikaze style
from the Sears Tower
as a fat chubby man
with a faded name tag
that I could barely read
(but I thought it said Orwell)
hailed a taxi cab with his left foot
his lavender sock was caught
in the lake effect wind
and resembled a wind sock
atop a large house
with two windows that
stared into the street

a baseball cut the air
in front of my face
as I passed Wrigley
his feet tripped on
the ivy that had escaped

My 1984 continued

from the red brick walls
the naked lady tackled me
as I neared Soldier Field
my face kissed pavement
and left a hickey
the size of an orange
she shook me to and fro
screaming that I had told
Big Brother about our meetings
and all my chapped lips
could utter was that
I was not a rat

what little boys and girls are made of

by kristi brownfield

a fortress built of curved mirrors and snakeskins eagle eyes and pretty boy faces from video game tails and sugar and spice (too much spice too little sugar)

that's what little girls are made of.

a snail trips.

everything sensual is in the nape of the neck curved softly in submission proud in perfection yes everything sensual is in the nape of the neck.

puppy dog tails lie limp.

distorted reflections of people with animal bodies. fox-bodied god of mischievous tricks and comic books. at the last ... a mouth biting a mouth symbol of Loki rather it would be Hanuman.

that's what little boys are made of.

a chickenhouse on stilts approaches the fortress a leg tentatively knocks no one can come in the fortress has guests sorry cinderhouse you can't go to the ball because there are no such things as fairy godmothers because there aren't any wicked stepmothers either. If life were a fairy tale ...

I must say I prefer to be in the company of men, but ...

Near the ruin of a temple/city/civilization/world/universe/god all that I think and all I do is mirrored into that fortress and now it rains.

I don't mind the company of women either ...

what little boys and girls are made of continued

lunatic pandora iron maces with men idealistic crazy beautiful red
snowdrops from the bonefish people denizens of the fortress ruined
leftovers of Atlantis.

but even you (especially you) have to admit love is so rare and pre-
cious ...

squall maelstrom of time got to open the broken box time for
requiem (marionette
version)

that no matter the form it comes in you should take it and cradle and
nourish it ...

To Gerri

by megan guernsey

The night I went to see him about his dead mother,
I brought a pizza and a movie.
I was hoping he'd be drunk already and he was—
talking some shit about his ex-girlfriend
and rearranging the silverware.

I concentrated on the green olives
and the ghost in the room—
telling him to move the fork to the right,
eat everything on the plate.

"She's crazy and I've got to save her,"
he said, in scotch breath.
"She looked terrible, you should've seen her."
A Dali dispute in the Art Museum,
Greek restaurant lover's quarrel,
the time she got mad about the car.

It went on like this for hours,
until the final drink
left his head in his hands,
staring down at the cloth napkin
perfectly draped over his legs.

The fight was out of him,
like the ghost had finally silenced
and landed in his lap.

Junie

by joe raab

You know I used to come here all the time
with my wife

...every poem I do, I dedicate to her...

This was our coffeehouse.

I fell in love with her here

...every poem I do...

when she gave her Gonzo Mocca poem.

(I fell in love with her every poem after that.)

A black hole.

I arrive it hurts.

No longer just in space

in my heart.

I sent mine, filling,

but I lost.

Black.

Hole.

Heart.

Every poem I do.

This used to be our coffeehouse.

Beat

by wes payton

I couldn't begin to tell You what It is;
but I know where It is at.

It's under the jukebox.

covered by the machine that makes the cigarette smoke move with
its beat.

beats laid down by people You don't know,
You never met.

don't feel distanced, dysfunctional, disavowed, disenfranchised,

dropped.

they don't know
You either.

dust, bottle pieces, cigarette ends with lipstick,
phone numbers without possibility
written on napkins.

are drawn to Its trap.

It.

beating
with the beat
of the beat.

You can't make
It stop.

in Its coffin, under the hydrogen jukebox.

Beat continued

You
can hear It at times when It misses. although
You
would have to be one of those people who listen.

Its beat between the rhythm.
coming from under the box (covered in napkins)
from be
low.

I'll tell You that.

Mercy

by autumn williams

Daddy dearest, God of Pigs,
Which one dies today?
Striking quick the runt's hind legs,
Your arm, the hammer swings.

In the corner, huddle—
The vacant straw-strewn stall.
Head turned, covered ears,
Sing over the cracking skull.

Upon the concrete, mixed
With shit, mixed with the maggot's meal,
A baby's corpse, a mother's kiss
By mercy's reason killed, you said.

Daddy dearest, they're after me.
I dreamt that you they slaughtered,
Then locked me in their fenced corral—
Watch them stampede Mother.

God of Pigs, your sacred touch
Tells me night passed on.
I hear their feeder-lids clang shut,
Electric fences clicking—

Traveling

by denise fitzer

I used to hide my stretch-marks,
like a pimple covered
in Mary Kay powder—
a false shade on pink skin.

The lines move across my body—
legs,
 arms,
 breasts,
 belly.

I used to wish them away.
But now,
when my lover
traces them
with her finger,

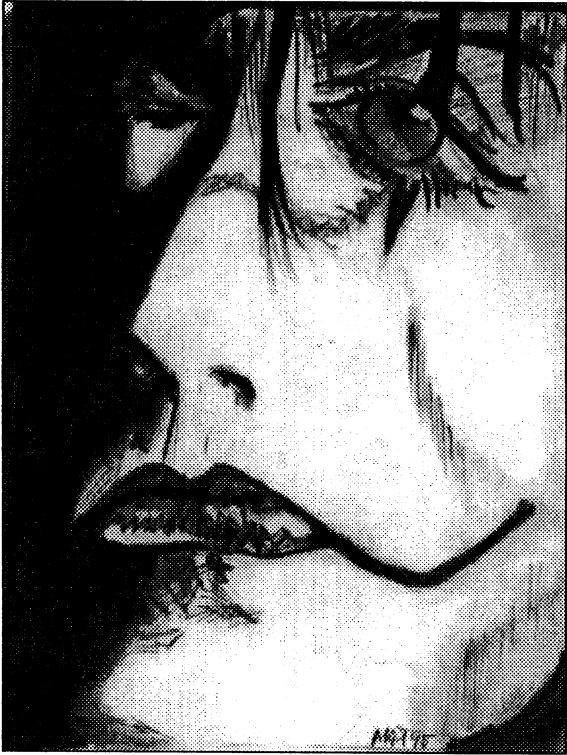
telling me she loves
the road-map patterns
they make,
I want to travel,

take them with me,
show them
the mountains,
the ocean.

Oh, they've seen them before,
but only when
they were young.
Now they've grown,
and I with them.

Untitled

by matthew a. thomas



a story of rape

by annie white

The glass lies broken on the ground where it landed, red wine covers the tile. For once you could speak, but you never do. Bitter sadness mixes in with your red liquid anger in my mouth. I look into your eyes of autumn and realize why I hate the fall. Silent as a mouse, strong as hate, you block my every thought. You make me weak. Oh lover, in the summer, in the midst of the beautiful flower, I crumble to you and wilt.

Driving home from Memphis with the frigid air being sucked in through the window and hitting me in the face. The music's up loud so we won't fall asleep and it's raining so hard I swear it'll bust through the windshield and flood us. In the middle of the insanity of the night I almost want it to. I ask him if he wants to pull over until the rain clears, if he wants to get a motel in some small town in southern Missouri with names I've never heard of but he just shakes his head no, he wants to get home.

My thoughts float back to you, Ian. Back to you and that summer of agony. You were beautiful like a butterfly and flew into my life and I have never been the same. You had these intense, Indian eyes, they were like autumn. I'd lie with you and crawl into those eyes and try to see your world through those eyes but it was an impossible task. Those eyes were always looking into the distance, at something I could never see.

You'd paint pictures of me that were so beautiful I couldn't see myself in them. We'd lie in your backyard and look up and count stars and you'd read me poetry and the words just seemed to flow out of you like the poetry was coming from inside you, not from the book in your lap. You'd pick flowers for me and we'd go on long walks in the country and try to figure out why the world was full of so much pain.

Five years later and I'm still reeling from it all. Five years later and I still haven't recovered. It's been so long I say but it's like yesterday in my head and I'm right back to that haze-filled night with the

a story of rape continued

stench of smoky hands covering my mouth and the weight of you on my back, caving me in to the dirty bare mattress. I wonder what you are doing now I think. I look up at the half moon and starless sky and wonder if misery has found her way to your door yet. I wonder if she ever could.

What are you thinking about? He says, pushing up the button to roll up the windows. I try and think of something to say but he already knows the truth and there is nowhere to hide in this small car filled with suitcases and empty soda cans. I'm just tired I tell him.

I think he is so tired he almost believes it. Either that or he doesn't want to hear about it again. Either way. I'm living in darkness, trying to escape and he doesn't want to hear about it because it makes him depressed, he says. It makes him angry, he says. I wonder what he thinks it does to me.

We pull into a truck stop and I pour us some coffee in Styrofoam cups while he pumps gas. Back in the car I spill coffee on the map and he yells. At three a.m. in the darkness of the night he yells and I start to cry. I look out the window so he won't see and just wait for home.

Hours later we pull into the parking lot behind our apartment building and two girls are yelling at each other in the parking lot while he unloads the trunk I stare at them until they catch me looking. I grab a suitcase and he leads the way to the door. Inside I halfway expect our home to be trashed, I expect you to be in the shadows, ready to strike. Instead darkness attacks and with a flip of the switch I put down the suitcase and see everything's alright, just the way we left things, looking alluring but nightmares fresh underneath.

I wash my face and he pees next to me and we fall into bed like we haven't slept in months, like it's the safest place in the world to be. He tugs at my underwear that are on inside out and says he misses me. My head is pounding from the coffee and from the mem-

a story of rape continued

ories but I don't say no. I let him climb on top of me and mount me like a fucking expedition and rub my hair as he comes inside. I feel the stickiness drip down my thighs and rolls off me and asks if I'd taken my pills while in Memphis. I tell him not to worry and he just gruff and soon his breathing become heavy and his stomach rises and falls and I try to get out of bed without waking him.

I grab my underwear and stuff them in the bottom of the laundry basket and put on my dirty jeans and jacket and head for the door. Outside I smoke cigarettes even though I don't smoke and watch the planes fly above and wonder where they are going and who's inside and where you are.

I try to think about family back home, my cat sleeping on the floor next to the refrigerator, my boyfriend in bed, anything but you. But you are the first thing that comes to mind when it's almost light outside and I haven't yet seen sleep. I burnt the lasagna, I lost the lighter, I spilt the wine, lasagna, I spilt the wine; I was nothing in your eyes.

Cars screech up and drunk boys get out and start to fight. It takes a minute to register, at first it looks surreal, I'm living in a dream. But soon I see blood stained hands and puffy eyes and jaws and all the sudden it's all too real. Running back to our door where I'm supposed to be safe I trip and fall on the hard concrete. Bloody faces turn stare and I think it's over, this is the end all over again.

Hey! Who the Hell are you?

What the fuck are you looking at you stupid bitch? Get the fuck out of here!

and I run back to my door and pound on it and don't glimpse back because I'm scared of what I'll see.

He answers the door and I tell him that people are fighting outside and he screams at me for waking him up. He raises his hand up and I flinch because I'm scared he's going to hit me and I run to our bedroom. I just want sleep and to make this stop but it's not over yet.

a story of rape continued

I'm not him for Christsake, Ellen. Fuck, I'm not him. Why do you do this to yourself? I'm not going to hit you, I'm not going to rape you. I'm not him. He screams.

I want to melt into the pillows and I breathe in the smell of him on the sheets. He finally stops yelling and lies next to me and tries to hold me close and I hate it. I hate it but I'm scared of him so I let him do it as I listen to the yells of a man getting beaten outside my window.

Teddy Rhexis

—by paul auster—

But see how the young, innocent human intellect is startled at the enormity, when that great secret of the world first becomes known to it!

– Arthur Schopenhauer

“On the Affirmation of the Will-to-Live”

Around the age of nine or ten, my parents saw fit to have an animal about the house for our entertainment. I, being the youngest, was allowed to name the nominated dog, and, in the tradition of all small children in the latter half of this fine century, labeled the poor mutt after some toystore—cartoon character of the time, long since forgotten by most: Teddy-Rex, the talking, singing, fun-time bear (batteries not included). I can't quite remember if my preference was in hopes of late evenings with teddy's storytelling and sing-alongs of fantastic revelry or if my child mind merely spit out the last commercial output it had absorbed, but surely it was one or the other. Needless to say, Teddy didn't quite fit the bill.

The bitch grew into the annoyance my father had certainly predicted, father performing his role as the rational Cassandra of family decision making. She shat on the rug, knocked over piles of laundry and trash, meddled with the easy flow we never knew but the absence of which we felt free to blame on the new member. As I look back, Teddy seems much the martyr, from a certain perspective, that is. She took the fall for any mess that my nine-years-elder sister and her suitors may have left the previous night, my misplaced Voltrex velcro shoes, even the heated debate my slowly separating mother and father enjoyed concerning which utensil really was the “spatula.” I'm to this day a little confused anytime I walk into a foreign kitchen, confronted with cookware choices. The invention of Teflon was a major paradigm shift. So she held the family together for a while. My sister Sarah and I united in disgust when Teddy threw up from the roof, very nearly pouring the pinkish-red fluid into

Teddy Rhexis continued

jug of tea which sunned on the front lawn until the impact of the small, falling animal rendered the summer operation fruitless. Teddy even took the blame for her own presence on the roof. Father was able to feel confident in his now unchallengable foresight that this dog business was only trouble while mother was able to offer new spring chores to her children, keeping our hands from the devil's play. My sugar addiction, barely satisfied by pure granulated consumption beneath the foldout couch every Saturday morning, was overlooked in light of Teddy's having finished the bowl off and innocently playing with the evidence while I vibrated with joy at the last ten minutes of Pee-Wee Herman's Playhouse. The poor beast suffered greatly, but not without reason. She was no less sent by God himself.

But Teddy had one glaring drawback in my eyes. Indeed, it was my youthful ignorance that fed my rage. I am no less a devil with this excuse...With the big, yellow-brown couch folded into its former self, I would come to, rising out of some bizarre trace, listening to Sis ridicule my absent-minded face. I was never truly conscious of it, for upon waking, the pained expression Sarah soon related in mimicry would instantaneously vanish from my features. Staring with a gaping mouth into the television, my lips apparently contorting down and outward, brow bending into a frown, I lost myself in the myriad pixels before me, absorbing, like a sponge, anything advertisers or cartoonists wished me to believe. I remember missing entire episode of The Smurfs, returning from space only in time to see a spiraling pentagram speeding at my head. Its colorful trace would catch up with the white star in time for the name "Hanna-Barbara" to magically materialize below.

On one occasion, Teddy revealed her dark secret to me, a secret that has become so familiar to me as if I have known it all my life. The Sunday morning turned for the worst as fat, bulging thunderclouds rolled in. I was stuck indoors with a line up of old and generic cartoons, unworthy of Saturday's reputation. For this reason,

Teddy Rhexis continued

Sunday's was always a poor imitation of the previous morning. I rarely bothered to break out the hide-away bed. My glucose fix was out of reach for at least another seventy-two hours: it was a long haul, and I wasn't afraid to show anybody. Teddy had grown and been housebroken by father. Occasionally, mother would discipline, though with less territorial ferocity than the head of the house who felt wholly justified in shoving one end of the animal in its own excrement while beating the other. At times, I found great satisfaction in watching this. Father always wore a stoic face during these episodes, never flexing a muscle in his mask while those of his arms powerfully gripped Teddy by nape of the neck, forcing her downward again and again with each stern word. In turn, I felt fully justified in my less consistent reprimanding of Teddy.

My bursts of anger rose out of me solely when I found us sharing a warm evening together in the family room. The house was vacant. This was the way it started and, I felt, the only way it could continue. Sitting, calmly, my eyes sightlessly staring at the screen, I was aroused by a cushion sporadically brushing against my leg. I glanced down. Teddy was backed up against the base of the couch, rigidly rubbing her rear against the place where pillow met the hard foot board from which the Saturday bed would spring. I did not understand. Looking at her face, mouth opening and closing with quick pants, she didn't seem to know I was even there. She stared off, blankly, into some place I had never seen.

The first shouts my small voice called out were completely ignored, though this practice was to become more a formality than a genuine effort. The rage bubbled in me as if all Saturday mornings were now to be replaced by its pale sister Sunday; as if Christmas was to be forgotten for the celebration of New Years, the holiday I had never understood. The blows began. My foot fell softly at the start of that first occasion. As I did so, Teddy's foreign movements pulsed all the more quickly. The admonishment only fed spasms. Her raised head, moved left to right as if glancing, without fear or care,

Teddy Rhexis continued

at what was behind her, ignoring it, then staring ahead once again and renewing her unintelligible efforts. I was ignored and my teeth began to show from behind my lips. I had found a place where all my strength could be used, where I could scream as loud I was able, swing as wildly, break as slowly. A gate had been opened. With all my childish might, I stuck her in the same place my father had shown me. With every thrust of the animal, I drove my foot down, harder and harder, then clenched fists, faster and faster, until I came to.

Biographies

—The Vehicle—

Paul Auster is looking for an honest, nurturing woman of 65 who values truth as she does herself. Applicant need not exist.

Jason Brown is a senior English major.

Kristi Brownfield is a sophomore English major.

Stephanie Carpenter is a junior English major.

Tara Coburn is a junior English major with a women's studies minor.

Denise Fitzer is a graduate student in English.

Businge Roger Godfrey is a senior English major.

Megan Guernsey is a graduate student in English.

Kim Hunter is done. Finally. "The rock is cool but the struggle is better." – Indigo Girls

Dave Moutray is a senior English major.

Wes Payton is a first semester grad student in English. His favorite color is lime.

Joe Raab is a freshman weighing in at a monstrous 135 lbs. He is as fiesty as a small dog and enjoys his happy-go-lucky life. He owes everything he knows about poetry to Ray Stevens and the Lone Ranger.

Lisa Sarm is a sophomore English and art major.

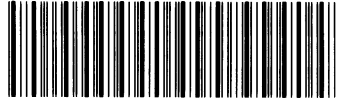
Biographies continued

Matthew A. Thomas is a junior art education major. He is from Bloomington-Normal. He hopes to teach college art; he has an emphasis in painting and dabbles in poetry.

Annie White is a junior English major with a women's studies minor.

Autumn Williams is a senior English major from Iola, Illinois. She previously attended Olney Central College.

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