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Authors

Keila Tooley, Michelle Mitchell, Bob Zordani, Angelique Jennings, Graham Lewis, Jennifer K. Soule, Kathy Gray, Becky Lawson, Jennifer D. Pringle, Debbie Woodley, Joan Sebastian, Kim Dumentat, Maggie Kennedy, Tammy Bates, Eric S. McGee, F. Link Rapier, Brett Wilhelm, Bea Cessna, Gary Burrows, Amy Call, S. Hill, Patrick Peters, and Lynanne Feilen

Poetry

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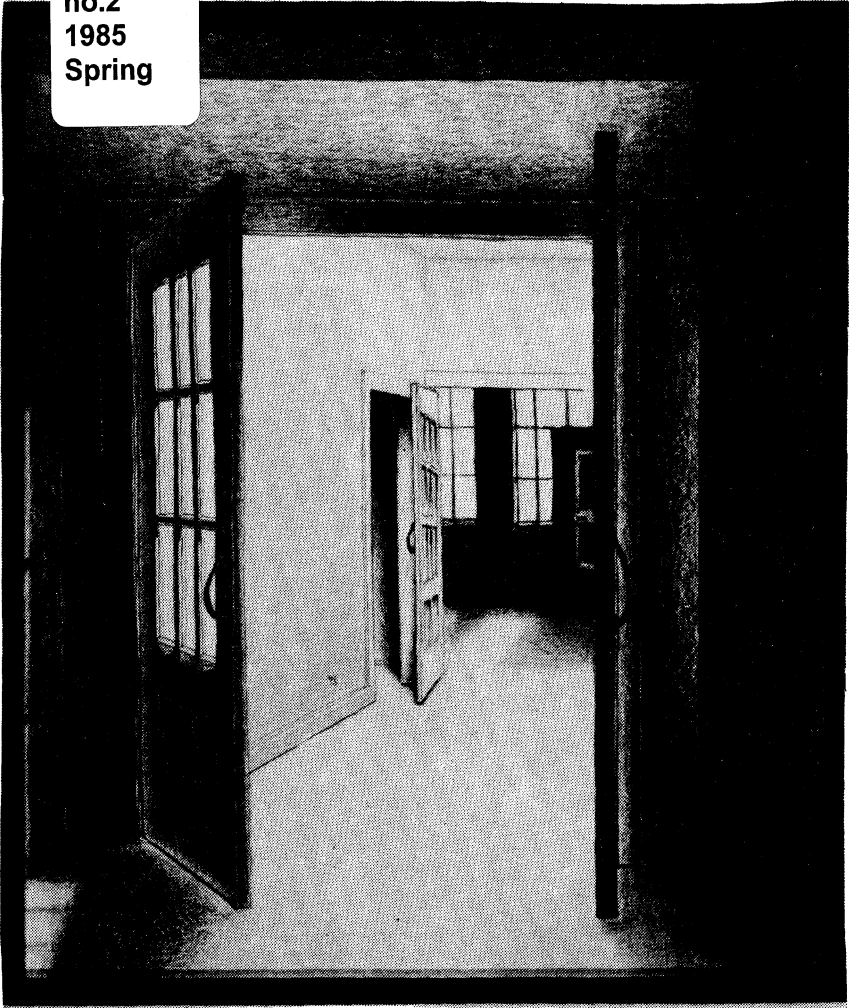
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THE VEHICLE

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Spring 1985

Editors

Michelle Mitchell
Maggie Kennedy

Editorial Advisor

Dr. Evelyn Haught

Production Advisor

David Reed

Editorial Staff

John Fehrman
Lynanne Feilen
Lynn Galbreath
Angelique Jennings
Becky Lawson
Jennifer Soule
Kristi Sullivan
Marlene Weeks
Bob Zordani

Special Thanks to

Sharon Bray
Karin Burrus
Marc Pacatte
Collating Staff
Dave Jorgensen

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Beyond the Fields

There is so much behind us to remember,
and because we can only remember one thing at time,
we constantly turn within ourselves, only to turn
again. Earth plowed under, earth turned up.

Think of this: how many times has the cat
dropped to the ground under the mimosa to sniff
the dry grass for old and fading animal scents?

So much is left behind to turn on its own.
The scent of our clothes and our bodies drifts behind
us as we move, settles on the objects we lay down—
a plow, leather reins, an axe, seeds.

The autumn rains have arrived—
and what they carry away remains within us, turning
like a plowshare diverted by embedded rock.

There is no end to the lines we draw every day
as we travel back and forth over old fields, plowing.
The ball of string the cat unraveled as a kitten
unravels even now, the loose end long vanished.

The winter comes each year, covering the marks
we leave behind, and the spring follows, thawing
the ground to fragile mud under our heels. And again
old tracks seem fresh to us, shallow beside the new.

Kella Tooley

Lonely Sculptor Accustomed to Living Alone

Bold chunk of woman
on his shelf,
he glides the knife, left—
handing the nose, eyes, mouth, and when
at last he finishes her
expression, still he knows
she won't understand him, always
the lid left up, always the stove on High,
and the paperback in the soap dish,
so he takes off her face
and begins again.

Michelle Mitchell

Mona Lisa

Mona Lisa waits for her husband
With hands crossed. She's horny as hell.
The smile gives it away.
Her mother has the kids overnight.
Roger will be home in fifteen minutes.
Her mind wanders circles around him.

Bob Zordani

Poet Born in Pearl Harbor

Students ask for supplies of cyanide
to prepare for the end of the world.
I want it too. Because of the bomb drills:
six year olds with duffel bags,
wash cloths, motel bars of soap,
canteens of old water. Mine
had a piece of adhesive tape,
naming me. *Remember the number
of your shelter. Do not cry so loud
you cannot hear directions.*
We were told we would survive,
and could safely eat fruit
that has been washed.
Radiation is invisible
but fall-out can be seen,
like dandruff on the food.
*Where will you find water?
In toilets, water heaters,
cisterns. Squinting, I wished
I would be home with my mother
who wouldn't make me go out
to search for food. Do not imagine
women hauling children behind them,
men stopping work to watch a cloud grow.
The patterns of their clothes
will be sealed to their chests.
Do not color war. Sometimes
I still play under the white warnings
of jets.*

Angelique Jennings

Introductions

Sweating tombstones through the hot greasy shadows of Wainwright's, Barnes Wilson Maddox fixed his red-veined eyes intently on his son.

"Have some ketchup, boy?"

"No thank you. I'll have mustard."

Barnes frowned and shook his head. Thank you, all the time he says thank you. I'll bet she told him to act like this. He tried again.

"Would you like a Coke?"

"No sir. Thank you."

Dammit, thought Barnes, his scar a bone-white half-moon. Polite is one thing, but... "Stop calling me sir!" I'm your father, call me Dad." The boy started, eyes round and hesitant. Barnes caught himself, lowered his tone and continued. "You don't have to say thank you all the time either. Once in awhile is fine. O.K.?"

"O.K.," replied the boy, Jamie Hardin Maddox by name. He smiled and peeled off a corner of cheese poking out from underneath his burger bun. Into his grin it went; he chewed it thoughtfully. This isn't so bad; most adults make you say "sir" and "thank you."

Barnes Maddox turned in his seat, heat pockets bouncing in the stale air adding to his discomfort. He played a strange game with the cap of the ketchup bottle resting before him. Pushing it, then picking it up and dropping it. Over and over. Push. Up. Down.

"Tell me, boy, how is your mother doing? She won't talk much to me, y'know, and I do worry about her."

Jamie knew this was a lie, He was fully aware of the hate between his mother and father, though he couldn't understand it. Life, a mere month ago, had been effortless. He did not miss having a father all those eleven years. With the help of his mother's coaching, he had learned not only to live with the stigma but soon forgot to notice it.

Jamie's mother, Cynthia Anne Borden Maddox, told him long ago that his father had been put away, that his father was a bad man and needed to be punished. She also told him to tell anyone who asked that his father was dead, killed in Vietnam. She told him these things when he was seven, and he had simply nodded. Yes, Mommy. He didn't pretend to know what Vietnam was; he knew it was a nasty word. No one ever said it with a smile or laugh. And now, here was the man. Back from the grave of nasty words, like Dracula, Jamie noted. He didn't look like Dracula though, even with the scar. Barnes, engrossed in waiting for an answer to his question, sat there across the sticky table playing with his bottlecap, looking odd in the strained way Jamie had seen before in other men, other kid's fathers who had risen from their graves of nasty words. Divorce. Death. Sex. Alcohol. Jamie knew all the words. To him, they were symbols of evil, their meanings and effects still a mystery.

Mom's O.K.," Jamie answered as he had been told. "She goes to work when I go to school and is home when I get back." He nodded to himself. "Mom's O.K."

"Good," said Barnes, tracing his scar with his fingernail. "I'm glad." He shifted in his seat, wishing to hell he wasn't so hot and uncomfortable. He didn't expect to have been greeted as a returning hero, but the contempt of his wife and the polite coolness of his son made him wonder if life had not been better on the inside, put away. He started again.

"How's school going?"

"Fine."

"Which class do you like best?"

"P.E.," said Jamie, perking up as if to catch a frisbee. "We get to go outside and run. That's what I like best, running." Finally, thought the boy. A question I like to answer. Barnes could feel the enthusiasm of his son, and he searched his mind for a follow-up that might produce the same results.

In the split-seconds that passed while Barnes Maddox pondered his next question, Jamie Maddox had left what we call reality, remembering the last night's dream. He was running, as he usually did in his dreams, down West Main Street. As he passed Elder Cadillac on the right, coming east up Signal Hill, he turned and spied a man dressed in black following him. He couldn't see a face, but the man had a knife and was waving it frantically. The man chanted again and again, "I'll get you boy. I'll get you. I'll get you boy. I'll get you." Jamie shifted his Ked's Flyers into overdrive, and hauled ass until the man was a small black dot on the horizon's bent middle. When his mother woke him, his soaking pajamas and sheets complained that he had, in fact, wet the bed. End of nightmare. End of daydream. Jamie returned almost before he left and focused on his father's anxious smile. He stared at the scar buried in Barnes' cheek like a skinny river of milk, and it became a question mark. Jamie was not afraid. Barnes hurried.

"So you run, eh? Which event? Mile, quarter-mile, cross country? Which one?" Jamie giggled. He wanted to make his father guess which event he liked best, but he was leery about playing a game. Sometimes adults become angry when they are teased. Jamie's mother sure did. So he simply spilled it.

"Cross country."

Barnes Maddox was impressed. He had been a fat child and used to hate the jerks who populated cross country teams. All of a sudden, he thought the idea quite grand and hoped his son would destroy all competition. "Runners. I just love 'em," he added genuinely. "My favorite people in school were runners." His eyes narrowed. Jamie saw him leave.

Barnes found himself remembering his grammar school days and immediately dismissed them. Feeding on old dreams only made him ill. He wouldn't have believed in a million years, then, that such crappy hands could be dealt in life. It was all aces for awhile, though, said his parting thought as he put away grammar school and returned to Jamie. On a lucky streak, he continued.

"Would you like to go to a ballgame next weekend? It's the Cards and the Braves. Should be a good game, boy."

Again, Jamie perked. "Yeah, that'd be great! I haven't been to a game yet this season." The boy grinned, a tangible excitement the man made his own. Finally broke the ice. Good. Good. The air wasn't so close, and breathing was easier. Barnes almost forgot that he hadn't been to a ballgame in ten years.

He had seen the Cards win the '82 Series when he was inside. God, it was awful putting that away. No wife. No kid. No friends. No beer. Yet Barnes Maddox learned well the only thing prison had to teach: how to put useless things away. How to dig them deep and cover them. Occasionally they would rise, bone and all. In that case, the only recourse is to murder them, drive a stake of apathy through their resentful aching hearts. Barnes Maddox stared at his watch; it reflected a small tributary of his scar.

"It's almost three, boy. Your mother will be here soon. Did you have some fun? I hope your old man didn't bore you too much."

"No. I had fun today. Especially at the park. Those ducks were crazy." He laughed and swabbed a bead of sweat from his nose. He was positive his mother would not let him go to the ballgame. Barnes laughed back, turning his head in time to spot an old red Buick Riviera turn in off Route 13. It was his wife, Cynthia Anne Borden Maddox.

"Let's go, son. She's here." Jamie grabbed his father's muscular hand as they walked toward the steaming parking lot.

The woman sitting in the red car also had red hair. It was already going grey, and the blinding sun bounced off it like a million yellow golf balls. Barnes felt like taking a nine iron and crushing her beautiful features. She looked as unshaken and unmarred as she had eleven years ago, long before he had put her away. He gazed at her through the smeared windshield, and squeezed his son's hand.

"Ow! Dad, that hurts." The word "Dad" had spilled out of the boy before he had time to realize it. He liked the way it felt on his tongue. Dad. Daaad.

"I'm sorry, son. I wasn't thinking."

Of course, this was only partly true. Barnes may not have heard his son call him Dad for the first time, but it was thinking that had caused him to squeeze too tightly. He had left again, trying to hunt the vampires in his skull. It made his gut hurt, as he willingly allowed some of them to escape. He recalled in full the suffocating love he had once felt for the woman, the strange places they had dared to make love. He thought of the day they had parked the car at Bellevue Park to watch the ducks, and out of nowhere she had announced that she was pregnant. He also remembered the hate screaming from her pregnant eyes the night the police came to take him away. Barnes hurried to put it all back before it showed on his face. His smile lied.

"Hello Cindy." That's it, be nice. "I hope we didn't keep you waiting?"

"No, I just pulled in. Let's go Jamie, Mom's in a hurry." Cynthia Anne Borden Maddox was less than amused by her husband's fake politeness, and wanted to get away from him fast as possible.

Barnes led Jamie to the passenger side of the Buick, carefully opening the door. The boy jumped in, kissed his mother, and peered up at his father.

"Goodbye, Dad. I'll see you next weekend." Barnes caught the word this time. "Yes son. Yes, you will." It changed nothing; he knew that. Still, he had a bitch of a time trying to keep back tears. "You be good and listen to your mother. Goodbye." He bent to kiss his son, caught the glance of his wife, and shook the boy's bony hand instead. "See you next weekend."

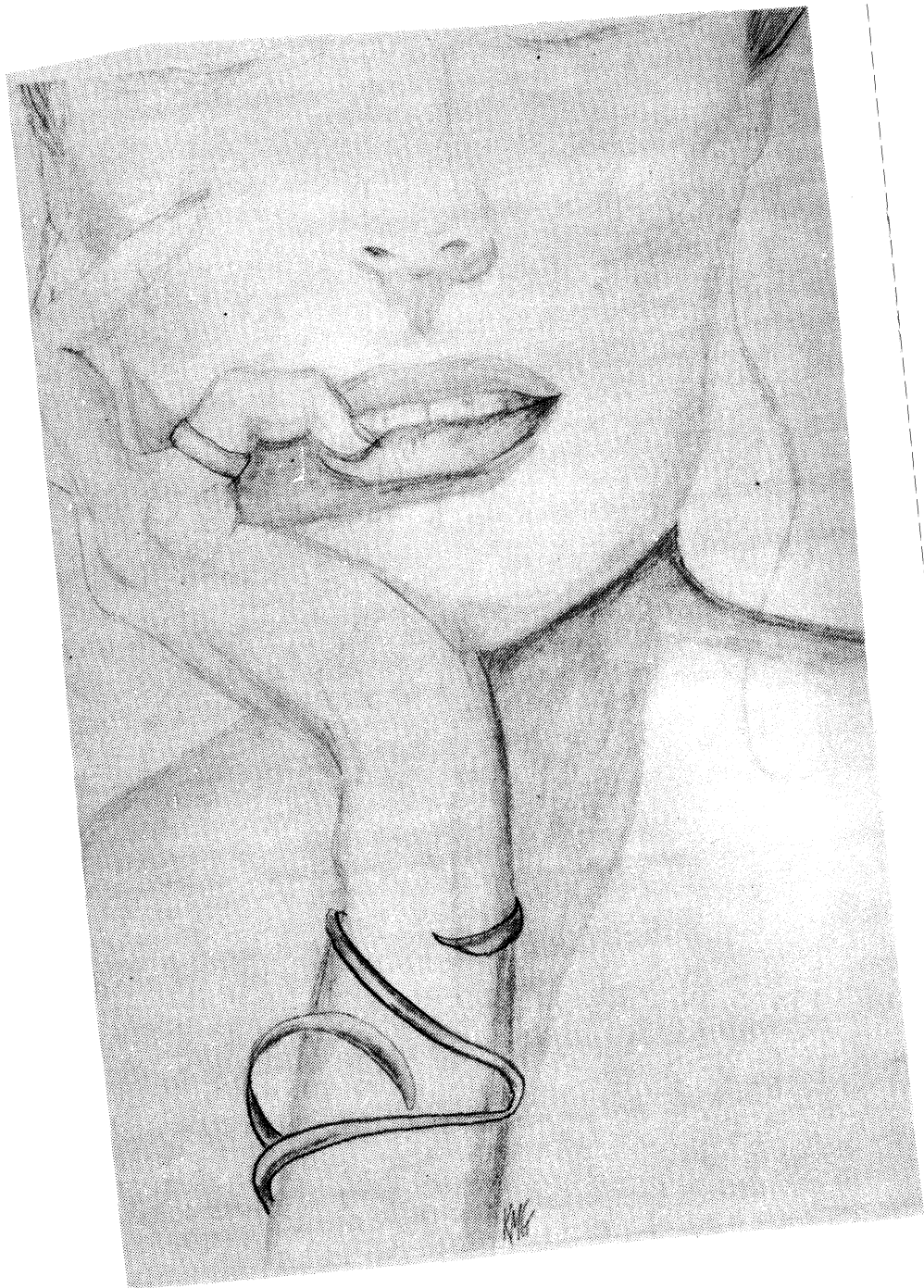
He closed the rusted car door gently, checking for Jamie's limbs in the cracks. He stepped back and waved. The car backed away from Wainwright's, and sped quickly down the road. The last thing Barnes Maddox noticed were the woman's eyes beaming back at him from the rearview mirror. He watched the red dot until it disappeared, touched his scar and began to walk.

Graham Lewis

Living Inside

Arms as visible as my own
reach through endless openings,
begging with movement
to draw me in.
I am tempted to feel
the texture of that aching space,
to engulf myself in its
sickening warmth.

Jennifer Soule



Salvadore Dali in a Wheelchair on TV

You go home and sleep in a fever, sweating
in your bandages and sad moustache.
Into the room come women
draping pizzas on their shoulders,
saints whose eyes are smaller skies,
faces and faces of you.
Bellies and breasts slide open
for your touch; your mind wants hips
and thighs of fine blown glass
to fill it. A yellow brush touches
Currier and Ives into children
restraining the wild teeth
of horses, women whose singing
trails behind them like a veil.
Open your mummy clothes and
you are young, rising
to bring out canvas
for dreams in a fever.
The palette on your thumb
is a clock; you paint
what you saw when you were old,
and molotov rosebuds.

Angelique Jennings

Sonata In E Flat

Measure by measure
the telephone lines
stretched across
the country
make a song
all their own.
Big grackle whole note,
little chickadee quarter note
Three sparrows huddled
together—
nature's E flat triplet.

Becky Lawson

Myopia and the Wild Kingdom

Without my glasses,
Marlon Perkins' shorts fan out
like underwater flowers bursting
open in fast motion
on Sunday evening television.
I eat canned tuna,
watch the ocean bottom swallow
a stingray whole.
(Jim doesn't get a chance
this one.)
He's at the jeep
with his men, looking very
much like a tiger and her young
picking at dinner—
one sorry-looking gazelle.
Marlon and his monkey are back at the office,
both faceless as the clock behind the t.v.
On map with no lines, rivers, or mountains,
Marlon points Jim in the direction
of a wild boar,
and breaks for a commercial.

Michelle Mitchell

On Becoming a Grandmother

I

Grandmother's head was born so large it was
lopsided, the midwife said "only bandages
tight enough to hurt can shape it right."

So, her infant head was bound and
under wail and flopping arms the skull
grew round within the vise of gauze.

II

Symmetrical by force, Grandmother
beats her fists upon the table
trying to pound her daughters smooth.

She stretches, smooths uneven waves
singed beneath the iron's weight,
yet fails to tame the rebel curls.

III

At night she tosses ivory pins into a dish
three feet of hair loose from the coil.
Hair swings and cracks under silver brush,

floating down like free currents.
Until she yanks it into a steel braid
and nails it to the bone again.

Kella Tooley

Vision

I am a dry
And arid wasteland
Thirsting for something
To make me green
A song
 the hum of wind among treetops
 echoing against the cliffs of my soul
A flower
 a rose whose crimson petals
 bleed upon the beige of my mind
A child
 cell on cell on cell to move
 within my barren womb
 and make me a miracle

Jennifer D. Pringle

The Covered Bridge

Take time and listen
to the creaks and groans
of the muted beams
enduring so many years.

Look down thru
the crevice
at the shimmery brook
silver in the morning sun.

Feel the rusty paint
weathered to a soft patina.
Walk in the grooves, uneven,
cross this bridge at a walk.

Debbie Woodley

Jacob's Life

He fled home to Seattle
where long standing traditions
forced him to cope,
where stone gray eyes
could sweep past the rocky landscape
and search for contentment—

broken right leg in a skiing accident,
get-well cards, Italian dinners and
Russian vodka, dancing in the splinter
infested red barn—full of laughter—

Long forgotten dreams, shown in rivers
crashing over rocks, in trees,
uprooted and dying.
He fled home for safety
but was recharged with energy

Joan Sebastian

Forgot

Sometimes we lie about the strangeness,
the distance between our parked tongues.
We work our legs to a gallop,
escaping the concussion of voice.

Our lungs, sore and thin from the last
forty cigarettes, suck and push hard ballads
of shadow-children satisfied in an empty house,
tossing bones to quiet's rowdy darkness and
bouncing off cliffs of light sneaking through
dawn's heavy air.

We wait for vision's clarity to remind us
scent and touch are mute.
With the light come words, and again
we shall curse.

Graham Lewis

A Dozen and One Trainsongs

The train twisted through the dark, and she could see only her face in the black glass of the window. Another train passed once, the lighted cars strobing by, the faces like a rapid slide show, which confused her more. She argued with him all alone. Her mind repeated one phrase in time with her heart and the song and rhythm of the train. He should have known. He should have known. He should have known.

1. Do you know that you never say anything that makes any sense after 7:00 at night? And do you know how it is to sleep with someone drunk four or five times a week (at least)? To fight for every bit of sleep you get, waking up to howls or growls or poundings on the walls or someone crying out a name that's not your own? Every night I wonder (because I've forgotten what it's like) how it is to sleep in a bed not pressed up against cold wall, how it is to stretch my legs out and not find someone else's lying heavy across them. Not having someone's hard knees ram you in the back in the middle of a dream. An elbow in the nose in the middle of deep sleep, snoring that makes you feel like you may as well get up and do something until it quits. By the time it does, the sun is making grey over the ridge there, and the birds might as well be saying, "you fool." In nineteen years we never had a couch wide enough or long enough to sleep on and sometimes I begin to think you planned it that way, but I know that's not fair. Well, I saw on television that if they make you wake up in the middle of the night over and over you won't be able to remember your name and address and little things like that after a while. Of course, they hook you up to a bunch of wires to measure your brain waves and pulse and things, and I don't have those wires, but put it down to the same thing because that's what I feel like.

2. Do you know what it's like to have something interesting or funny or sad to say and not have anyone to listen, even though there is someone sitting right in the same room with you? To know you've got something worthwhile to say and no one to even recognize that it's worthwhile? There are some people somewhere who have something else to talk about other than what they're having for supper and what channel to change the television to. I know it's true, but it's also true that I can't really prove it because I haven't known any of those people for so long that they're probably all dead or something. But it's still true. And what about those people on t.v. and the way they act and talk? Real conversation would be a lot better than that anyway. I get confused thinking about it sometimes, the whole thing about acting. I mean, if you imagine real people saying the things those people do, it's funny. And it's even funnier to think of an actor, pretending to be a real person, saying those things. And then if the actor is serious, it's almost too sad to be funny.

3. Do you know that there are some people who really aren't vain who would like to have some new clothes that don't come from a thrift shop or a rummage sale? I know this is silly, but I've always had this picture of myself in a sleeveless black dress that's not fancy, just elegant. Of course, in my picture I have on these drop earrings that sparkle and burst with light when you turn your head, and a necklace to match, but I always did suspect that that was a little much. Pretending. But just to have a dress that no one else has ever worn except for maybe if someone else tried it on in the store first. Or a pair of pants not faded at the knees, or a blouse that I don't have to take one of those little crochet hooks and pull the snags through to the inside before you wear it: that would be fine. Oh, I know if you watch the sales you can get some stuff for a dollar that would have cost you ten or maybe twelve brand new, but I'm just telling you what I always think.

4. Now I know you might not understand this, but have you ever wanted someone to take you somewhere, maybe even just a bar, an act like they were glad to be there with you? Not proud, just not sorry. I don't mean get all dressed up and spend money or anything, but just clean and decent, and not be hid away for just one night and have somebody act like they're not embarrassed of you. Maybe not go anywhere but just sit on somebody's porch in town (if you know anybody in town) and let people see you. Or maybe just walk down the street like you weren't in a hurry and talk a little and have nowhere in mind to go, but just be taking a walk. Just once.

5. If you're wondering what I'll do, I'll tell you right now I don't know; but in nineteen years I never did know anything I was going to do anyway until I did it, so it might not be too bad. Maybe it would be easier if people still needed ironing done. But I think I can live pretty cheap by myself, and I won't have to share my money with anyone else unless I want to; and no one will look at me mean when I buy something silly like a pack of gum or cigarettes just to try them out in front of the mirror to see what I look like with smoke in my mouth. I already know nobody needs mending done, so you don't need to think I'm planning on that. And anyway, I'll never spend my money on beer or wine or whiskey because I don't like the way it tastes, and I don't like to run into walls and doors and things that don't move out of your way. And I especially don't like to step on the cat. Take care of that cat.

6. Somethings you might need to know: that little girl is going to come around delivering the cookies, one box of chocolate mint and one sugar, and I already paid her. You can have them. It doesn't matter to me what you tell people about where I'm gone to, except Nell; and you can tell her I might write her. If chain letters come in the mail, you can just throw them away, no matter what they say, and not be afraid of it. I know because I threw out two recipe ones and one that promised you'd have ten thousand dollars by sending a dollar to the first two people on the list, and one that said you would be cursed and maybe die if you broke the chain. Nothing happened to me. You'd better tell the boy to stop the newspaper.

7. Do you know I always did know about that woman in the Mississippi Bar uptown, and I never said anything to you about it? But I was kind of insulted when I saw that she had more wrinkles around her eyes than I do, and that she is a rough talker too. I don't know if she ever felt this way, but I always wondered to myself what the use is of washing your hair when it needs it and pinching your cheeks and biting color into your lips and cleaning your fingernails if nobody's going to notice anyway. And did you ever wonder why I stopped trying to cook fancy food? It's the same thing—I saw that there wasn't even any need to know what side of the plate to lay the spoon on if no one was ever going to notice and just ate down whatever was there on the plate and never said anything. Just a loud burp and another beer.

8. Now it wasn't all bad, and I should be fair and say that I really did like the way you played the guitar, and your harmonica playing too, except later on in the evening when it would get real bluesy and loud and whiney. And the drunker you'd get, the worse it would get, and you'd be right in my face like you thought you were Charlie McCoy or somebody, and like I had cotton in my ears and couldn't hear or something. But I really did always like "The Ballad of the Green Berets" and "I'll Fly Away," and even "Last Date" when I was just in the right mood. And I really liked it when you would get out that old world atlas and show me where those countries were that they talked about on the news, even if I couldn't remember them after you closed the book. But that was a long time ago. And I always did laugh at the way you'd stand on your short leg unless you were trying to be big with someone and then you'd stand on your long leg. But I never said anything because I didn't know if you knew you were doing it or not.

9. I never did really mind cleaning other people's houses but I sometimes got to thinking mean thoughts while I was walking to town, because I'd get to thinking about that old pick up truck sitting behind the house. Oh, I know it makes that loud noise and probably wouldn't make it to town anyway, but I always think about what else we could have bought with that hundred and fifty dollars. That thing never was any good from the day it was bought, not even to get wood for the stove, which was what it was bought for. Except for storing tools in the bed of it, and to drive around in the yard and stand on when we put plastic on the windows for winter. And I sometimes think we could have bought a good ladder for a hundred and fifty dollars, and a fancy tool box, too.

10. I never will forgive what you did to that old dog. He wasn't hurting anything.

11. I never will understand why you sang that song, you know, the one where the woman was riding a motorcycle and fell off in the ditch, when that Avon lady was there. I didn't want to buy anything so you could have just let her have her say, and I know you were in the bathroom with the door closed, but we could hear it real clear. And it wasn't very nice, at least the last line wasn't, and I was awfully red in the face and so was she when she left.

12. Do you remember a song you sang once about this train is bound for glory? I didn't think it was much of a story, but now I do. I mean, I don't really think I'm too interested in glory or anything, but I'm sorry about being on this train and I don't think I probably will be later either. And if someone asked me if I would go back and do it all again if I was back there when I was eighteen, do over these nineteen years, I would probably say I would do it all the same again. But you know what? I really don't think I would. You just don't want some stranger to see that you're sorry about how you spent nineteen years of your life. I mean, I've been married to you longer than I haven't.

13. Now I never really started thinking about saving up for a train ticket until something one day just made me ask myself if I thought could live another nineteen years like the ones I just got through. And my answer was I'd like to do something besides just get through the years. I really don't know what I'm going to do, but I know I'm not going to write you a letter because you were there all those nineteen years too, weren't you? Well, you should have known.

Outside the lightening window towns and trees were beginning to show. She realized she had no one there to argue with. She didn't want to argue with herself.

Angelique Jennings

Women's Place

In this morning's hours
I dreamt I kissed you
in my father's house,
the ceiling's tight reign
barring warm seasons
and summer grass.

Jennifer Soule

Night Sailing

Night marries the ocean
Their eager bodies meld
Inky blackness embraces my world
Stars and their reflections, kisses
Blown from above to below

Carried by the winds whisper
I fly with my canvas kite
Onward and upward
Stretching a tail of wake
From sea to constellation

What adventures, once beyond reach,
Are available through this union?
Tonight my explorations
Encompass sea and sky
I sail the universe

Kim Dumentat

She Isn't There When

(for K.D.F)

He says, the cold biting
the window, to himself
“don't even think about calling”
and the bill, well...

A strange woman reflected
in the glass, he believes
he sees her
holding out her hands.

Michelle Mitchell

A Case for the Common Cold

The night manager
at the Louvre sees
Mona Lisa shiver,
making it necessary
to phone the physician
who, groggy from sleep
says simply to
keep the place warm,
and not to worry:
probably only a cold.
Relieved, the night manager
remarks his surprise
that this has not
happened sooner,
"with the flimsy frocks
these girls wear."
And marching back
to the painting,
brush in hand,
proceeds to paint a sweater
and ear muffs, red
against her olive skin.
By morning she is much less pale,
her cheeks actually rosy,
and the night manager
as he turns to leave
is certain he sees her smile.

Maggie Kennedy

the city

frozen for an instant,
lasting always
in picture,
brilliance and bleakness
of the city

skyscrapers stretched,
touching smog;
water tower standing proudly,
glowing like a holy cathedral.

red, green and blue rectangles
lining the street,
polluting the air.

snow blanketing the grass,
slush covering the street:

Chicago.

Tammy Bates

The Rattlesnake

I saw a form
Lying in the sage
Its color was dark buzzing tail in the air

With tongue flicking
Never blinking once
Its glare was cold and dead but true

Paths had crossed
Ruler and ruled
The distinction between was not clear

Almost unnoticed
The move was quick
I had it or it had me

Eric S. McGee

New Picture

I drive out of town
silently, forgiving nothing.
Stop the car and walk
to the edge of a picture

of a pond. Standing wrapped
in confusion, my hands,
like troubled white flags
move down my body.

Remorse, like his teeth,
loosens my buttons;
dropping my clothes, a mouth,
a trap, circling my feet.

A cold breeze lifts
soft steam from my skin.
Memory bats the air
like a doomed bird.

I dive deep into
water's dark nest
sinking steadily into
unlit forests of my lungs.

My held breath snaps—
I climb back up.
Bare trees explode
with red sparrows.

Kella Tooley

Lewis and Sin

Long before dawn screams at the lawn,
I hear your shadow at my bedroom door.
The dark, hollow and swallowing, doesn't hide you.
It lends shape to your tossed form, a language
in a sea of words.

"Old friend," you hiss, fat head hooded
through the doorcrack. "Am I not expected?
Did you not call? It is time we speak again."

I'm tired of you, you know that.
But you are never finished.
I crook my sausage fingers and you blow in soft,
a cough smothered by a pillow's heavy fur.

When I was Catholic, I would have
turned over in fright and stared dead-blank
at Mom's bent cross hanging tough above the
metal snake of my train set, careful to keep
my praying hands above the elastic of my underwear.

But now I'm older, my eyes grab light from
tubes in the ceiling, my hands wander, and I like
the sound of broken prayers gnashing on rosary bones.

Back at St. Mary's, they said your crowded tongue
would lick our ears and make us weak.
Like drugs, it would drain and lie.
It would whisper us to not worry, to multiply
and prosper at all cost.
To forget our fathers, and fly without them on black wings
sprung from the tar on our skinny legs.

But now I'm older, my legs are fat.
I wouldn't know my father's face, and
I like drugs.

(I tell you true. The parties are sacrifices,
and no one lies like a pretty girl at night.
You are right then, old friend, and I see your
voice spin 'round my neck.
I'm in college. I like parties, nooses, and
girls who lie.)

Back at St. Mary's, I said Goddamn, and
they
hit my knuckles with a ruler. It was like
swatting marbles with a baseball bat.
That shut you up for awhile, it sure did.
And on the playground later, I made
smaller kids barter in the scars:

One for you.

One for me.

Two for you.

One-Two for me.

Jesus, those nuns hated us!

Except for Sister Aimee, remember her?
She played guitar and danced,
rotating her anvil hips in a most shocking fashion,
those boring old hymns cutting loose
like Elvis preaching blues.
The other nuns groaned, and thought her mad.

She caught me once trying to peek up her habit.
I wondered what it was nuns wanted to hide,
I didn't know they were women.
Still, all I saw were your bloody eyes staring back.

She knew that, and cried when Sister Charity insisted
on The Punishment.
After, she said I was right to listen to you sometimes.
It would make me a better man.

She didn't believe in rulers,
in measuring your grasp with my small hand.
She believed in you, but wasn't afraid.
We need you, she said, to make us human.

But now I'm older, and I break rulers when I find them.
I don't believe in you, I know too many humans.
It used to be enough if I were Catholic.

"You know," I begin, oiled hands whispering down liquid
sheets.

"Sister Aimee was the only nun I ever liked."

Graham Lewis

My Funny Barbecue

My meat sizzles
as she saunters

up, tight-butted
little bitch with

nice gams, dips
her pinky in my sauce,

says hot stuff, boss,
save some for me,

and walks off, her
boyfriend looming

large as Texas
behind her.

Bob Zordani

In a Dream

On Minh's trail,
Chromium spheres
Chase naked Cong
In documentary footage,
Bursting in slow motion,
Silently shredding
The muddy day.

Drowning in the paddy,
My boots are stripped away,
Napalm celebrates on my skin,
Dissolving pink, red, green.
I fall to the Huey's steel
Floor, clothing gone, howling
Over the applause of rotor blades.

F. Link Rapier

This Winter's Cold

Dark covers me.
Even in my sleeping hours,
I feel the slow pull of you:
I dream your hair and your eyes,
red with constant tears.
I fight as I walk
to see the day around me,
to feel the cold of this winter,
as if pain could be enough
to turn me from you.

I picture you asleep,
sheets around your shoulders,
your outstretched hands on pillows.
I fight against meeting
the winter air between us.

Jennifer Soule

Diary Entry

November 15, 1982:
Visited Grandma's house today.
Raining,
wind blowing.
Cold, dark
and empty.
Old, brown
player piano,
less a pianist.
Blue and green afghans,
she had knitted,
supplying no warmth.
Little china doll,
dressed in fading pink,
wondering why she had gone.

Tammy Bates

Minor God and Patron Saint of Rabbits Speaks

In some things, your hunger
holds its hat over your heart.
I judged them safe,
stacked under the window
where I could answer them
in the night, if they were nervous.
When I heard them from the cages,
rumbling wire and screen,
I thought it was a dream and
something ate the feet of
a young one. I would have
sentenced myself to walk barefoot
through droppings and pellets
and apricot pits in the yard,
rather than chop it on the back
of the neck the next day, but
you can eat rabbits without feet.

There are agreements, when you
keep animals in a cage: you give them
what they need. But I forgot
a nesting box and the black doe's
babies fell through the cage
and the dog ate them. She did not know.

You cannot touch them so they
know it, or the mother will let
her litter die, still you must take
the dead from the box each day.
If you want to sleep or go to a bar
or swim, you let it go.
One doe knew my smell
because when she was orphaned,
I kept her behind the stove,
fed watered milk through an eyedropper,
and I felt safe reaching in my hand,
through the straw, hot and bumpy,
moving more than sleepy baby rabbits do;
all that was left was a ball
of moving maggots and white fur.

There is no thunder in my sleep when
I dream of it: a fly finds
one dead baby lays its eggs;
the litter still snuggles into itself.
It is slow, feeding and death together,
while I drink wine and swim
in the cold spring.

Angellique Jennings

A Moment

Just before sunset
I sit on a cliff,
overlooking the sea.
The fresh aroma of salt spray
tingles my nose, fills my head.

Looking up, I watch seagulls
gracefully spin and wheel,
gliding of fluttering silk.
White breasts, wings of gray,
beautiful in their bleakness.
They screech and squawk,
speaking in an eerie tongue.

Below the cliffs
waves come in
from distant lands unknown.
They hurl their fluid bodies,
breaking on jagged rocks,
as cannon shots
shake the cliffs.
The mist hangs, a moment,
sparkling, shining like stars.

Brett Wilhelm

The Bishop Seat

The darkened door jamb shattered at the lock, splinters falling to the floor. Dorcester tensed his water-soaked body and made for the closet. No! The burly man would surely look in there! Dorcester crossed the floor of his small flat and lifted the lid of the bishop seat that sat against the wall.

Another kick: the door bounced off the foyer wall, leaving a knob-sized crater. The vibration sounded through the quiet flat as the burly man glided in, and Dorcester closed the lid over himself with a raw-lunged gasp.

Dorcester had been working late for weeks now. He did not mind; he had no life of his own outside of the accountancy office of Corruthers & Associates. No wife, and of course no children. These late nights would pay in the end—perhaps even a junior partnership. But enough is enough for one night. He collected the ledgers that were stacked on his desk and slipped them into his leather satchel. He stopped to rub his fatigue-dried eyes, then switched off the sole lamp in his desk.

The street lights failed against the twilight as Dorcester stepped onto the glistening cobbles of 151st Street. The drizzle beat on his overcoat and streamed into his shirt; he flipped up the collar and pulled the fedora down to his brow. He mumbled to himself as the darkness dripped from his brim.

His steel heel-guards clacked as he made his way around the corner. The guards were a good idea; they might triple the life of the oxfords. A chilling gust ruffled the paper that bulged out of his bag. He ducked into the breezeway of Sorel's Appliance.

Tommy Dorsey swayed out of a new model radio with a self-illuminated dial; Dorcester tapped a wet wing-tip. He looked out at the sky that glowed a light pink. His grandfather had told him that was a sign of snow. Snow would be nice. He wrung the water from his mustache and took out a pack of Kingsfields. He lit one and tilted the fedora back on his crown. Humphrey Bogart-style. He looked at himself in the display window glass. He took a long hard drag on his smoke and let it roll slowly out of his mouth and nostrils, eyes in a thoughtful squint. He positioned the hat on a slant over his right eye. He chuckled. Too handsome to be a Bogart, too ugly to be a James Cagney, and too short to be a Gary Cooper. He dropped the cigarette, and it hissed out in the damp carpeting.

He glanced out down the street. In the phone booth at his bus stop, a very large man gesticulated wildly at the receiver, slamming his fist against the steamed glass. Perhaps the man would leave the booth, and he could take the man's place out of the rain. Where were the others who huddled under Sorel's awning when it rained? Thanksgiving! Too involved in his own work for his own good.

The rain spattered louder on the canvas awning. Well, maybe the burly man was just finishing his conversation and would be gone by the time Dorcester reached the end of the street. He secured his fedora and smoothed his mustache, bracing himself for his race through the steadily increasing downpour.

He neared the booth, but the man was still inside. Swell! What kind of man does business at night on Thanksgiving! He shook his head and stamped the steel of his foot with a crack. Lightning struck the sky with discordant pink.

The burly man whirled in the booth and clawed at the latch, his teeth bared at Dorcester. The receiver clattered against the glass.

Dorcester clutched the satchel to him.

"How long you been there?" he seethed. "What did you overhear?"

Dorcester froze. The burly man grabbed at him, yanking his satchel to the pavement. Dorcester broke away and ran in retreat to the sound of the rain roaring in his ears. The drops stung his eyes; he fought to see, falling into an alley. He hid behind a fire-escape cluttered with paper and Excelsior-filled packing crates. He tried to slow his panting, the steam from his mouth, glowing. The silhouette of the burly man appeared in the light at the end of the alley; he stopped, his head cocked; Dorcester held his breath. The shadow turned and continued on. Dorcester waited a moment then ran into the pink-brown shadows, toward his flat.

Dorcester remained still in the confinement of the bishop seat. Salty water ran into his eyes; he did not blink. Through the gap in the lid he could see the burly man place his umbrella in the stand at the doorway. How strange. Dorcester felt no fear, only the numb of someone totally violated; he felt detachment.

The burly man wiped his feet on the door mat and strolled quietly into the living area and stopped. He looked around the room, his hands in his pockets. Then he crossed the room, out of sight.

A loud crash shook the bishop seat! The sound of Grandmother's china cabinet collapsing to the floor.

The burly man returned to the center of the room, then moved to the end of the sofa and turned on the free-standing lamp. He stroked the burgundy velvet with a bear paw. "Fine piece this is, Dorchester. Or is it pronounced 'Dorcester?'"

How did he know Dorcester's name? Who was this invader?

The burly man reached inside his coat and withdrew an ivory-handled razor. He glanced around the flat, then slit the sofa fabric from arm to arm.

Dorcester forced himself deeper into the bishop seat.

The burly man unbuttoned his overcoat and sat on the Louis XIV; it creaked, the binding sagged. "They didn't build these; they sculpted these. Art. Certainly not for a man of my dimensions"

Dorcester could only open his mouth as the man put one hand on either arm and pushed. The ancient wood squeaked, then gave way. He rose with the pointed arms in his hands and gored the cushion. "It's a shame that such a fine creation should have to perish merely for your errant curiosity."

What was he talking about? What "curiosity"? All he had done was go to his bus stop! He had done nothing but mind his own business all his life! What an evil man to just walk right in and vandalize Dorcester's life! The man moved out of sight again. Dorcester turned his ear to the gap.

The ice-box door opened to the sound of tinkling glass. Then a slam of the door. There was silence, then the squeak of wood much like the sound of the chair, only higher pitched.

The burly man returned. He placed a small packing crate on the coffee table. He was holding Dorcester's bottle of 1921 Claret! The other things were gifts from Grandmother! But this!

"Quite a good reputation considering the damage to the vineyards in the South. Terrible thing, the War. I don't believe the grapes have come back even now; quite distorted the reputation of this vintage."

Outrageous! Dorcester had paid a full \$85 for it! He was still recovering from the drain it caused.

The man grasped the cork with his finger-nails.

Dorcester closed his eyes.

The cork made a hiss.

He opened his eyes to the man sniffing the cork.

"Yes, quite bitter, I'm afraid. I hope you paid no more than \$25." The man walked slowly toward the bishop seat.

He knew. Probably since he turned on the light: the wet footprints leading to the seat. Dorcester's heart sank, echoing inside the coffin-like bench.

The man stopped inches from Dorcester. He could hear the wind of the storm moaning through the cracks in the window sill behind the sofa. The rain began again. A rain of vintage Claret on the lid of the bishop seat. The precious liquid hugged the rounded edge of the lid and made its way, streaming above his head. The drops began to fall on the brim of his fedora. He slipped the hat off and held out his tongue to catch them. Then the wine ran dry.

The burly man squatted in front of the bishop seat and corked the empty bottle. He removed his hat, revealing a large, craggy visage. He took a soggy card out of his coat pocket and slid it through the gap in the lid. "You know, you shouldn't put your home address on your business card, Mr. Calvin Dorcester. And should any of what you eavesdopped from my phone conversation reach the authorities, be it directly attributable to you or not, I will be back. I will most certainly be back."

He stood and strolled away and set the bottle softly on the coffee table. He hesitated there, but in one viciously quick motion, scooped up the bottle and hurled it through the window pane. He moved out of the path of the rain that began to blow in through the jagged portal, then picked up his umbrella. He opened it.

"I don't believe in 'bad luck,' do you, Mr. Dorcester?"

Dorcester crumpled the business card as the burly man shut the door.

F. Link Rapier

The Thought of Being Rid of Myself

(Dr. Miller's Traagic Vision)

My life is stacked in a box
in the middle of the living room floor;
It contains the language of the dead.

I keep trying to get a fresh start,
I imagine myself ten pounds lighter,
maybe cutting my hair, coloring it.

Then I realize: all fresh starts
are the same. And we, the same in
our sameness as madmen in their madness.

Author of my own story, my pages
remain fixed, silent in a box—
the wings of migratory birds.

Kella Tooley

I Saw A Child

I saw him again today; twice.
The first time he was a watercolor shadow,
Hiding in the flowers beside Uncle Tom.
He was at my brother's house, too,
When I called John's dad to say how sorry I was.
I used to ignore him, I just thought of him
As a movie star that you heard about but never saw.
But now he's an angry little boy in tattered jeans;
His eyes hollow and glassy from lack of emotion.
He taunts me like a child in the playground,
"I got your dad and your uncle and your friend and I'll get you!"
I wonder if everyone sees him as a child,
If he grows with us day by day
Until the moment he reaches his maturity—
Bold and strong,
As we slowly fade away,
Too weak and powerless to scold him anymore.

Bea Cessna

Complacent gourmet

Squinting through beady eyes,
face like a road map
posting Union 76 truck stops
across well-traveled country.
Jaw slides
sideways as he speaks
Honking
like a goose.
His clothes
wearing their age
and a layer of dust
patched and thin.
Cold doesn't touch him.
Warmth can't reach him.

The clientele mumble
and rumble with complaints
Bad service
Bad food
High prices
"I've seen worse,"
He said
Finishing what they left behind.

Gary Burrows

Night Dreams

A rose bush
brushes the window near my bed,
comforts me against shadows.
I have a fear of your night:
you reach for nothing,
I am nothing.

I hear you speak
when wind snaps my curtains aside,
letting light from the street
slant across ridges of my legs.
I fight to believe
if you were here you would
brush the hair from my eyes;
tell me that morning
is only hours away.

Tell me that my hands will fall
quietly at my sides,
untie the swelling of tears in me,
keep from me night dreams.

Jennifer Soule

Changing Images

The window is a picture frame
with drops splashing against cold glass.
Each globule races, rushing
to be the first to drain.

Enclosed, the canvas portrays
wet mosaic tiles of rusts
clinging to other tiles of reds.
Timber hushed by fog.

Soon, charcoal ink will seep
brushing the scene black.
Erasing day's blurry coat, while
creating a mirror image.

Amy Call

The Olsen Rug Co. Waterfall & Park

Mrs. Kelly next door
built a small replica of it
among her tomato plants—
with two plaster of Paris
Indians at the bottom
and what was left of
a Mexican blanket,
strung to make a tepee.
On Sundays she'd run a garden hose
over the rocks,
and we'd all stand back a pace,
squint our eyes and agree,
it was quite authentic.

But it wasn't the same.
Not like riding the streetcar
through so many stops,
we thought the city
must surely have ended,
before finally the Waterfall
—there in the front lot
of the Olsen Rug Company,
Indians hired to stand
cross-armed before the rocks.

On the ride back,
still warm from the sun
and clutching picture postcards
given us by the Indian chief,
we spoke of living in tepees
and falling asleep to the Waterfall.
When we talked of running away,
it was always there we ran to.

Maggie Kennedy

Edge of the Wild

Our reluctant boy in the apple tree is Bilbo.
Foced out by his internal Gandalf.

On his secret journey,
launched without a map,
he'll stumble blindly

through the Misty Mountains, grey.
Battered by goblins in the night
through the spun webs of the Mirkwood.

At journey's end,
near the River Running,
he'll count his treasures,

cleanse his stinging wounds.
Rising from the bank,
wise eyes shaded by deep brows,
he'll be his own wizard.

F. Link Rapler

Dragon

He parades like a lion, stalking,
Flaunting his frame of steel.
Envyng no other.

He cruises in a chariot, blue,
Ruling the highway,
Racing the engine.

He breathes fire from a Camel,
Puffing out Saturn's rings,
Sipping his spirits.

He is deadly, a dragon
Taunting me, wanting only
To be slain.

S. Hill

Harvests of Corn

I talk of corn hard as yellow
in them trucks the farmers drive.
Big piles for animals only.
How rock-like, and if I bite
on one ear, which can't hear,
my teeth will crack up.

Animals have the strongest of all teeth.
Some of them could chew bricks. Or big stones.
Most teeth scare people, especially
women. In the movies
they zero in on teeth,
big white dog teeth, biting
the face of our hero.

Heroes are always pretty.
So pretty that the bad guy, some
damned communist, gives up
by the end. But look:
Lemont Maxwell, farmer, regular hero,
has seven yellow teeth and the rest
falled out like kernels of corn.

If I had a farm and a truck
and some implements, I'd plant me
some corn, two or three fields,
and some beans, one field.
I like corn much more
than beans, but beans is alright.
Beans is contrast.

But I own nothing
except clothes and a radio
which gets the farm reports.
This year, the man is saying,
the ears are dry and brittle,
dropping from their husks.

Bob Zordani

The Club Jerome

No one chugs
at the Club Jerome.
Pictures solumn
straight-backed chairs.
Stiff lip
 razor cut
 smooth.
No leaning on the rail.

Shirley waits in line for the restroom
hopping on one foot.
Jiggling bottles,
cosmetics provide the floor show.
My face
Red as tomato juice.

Waitress floats by,
I order her approval.
Taste of night
 and moonlight
Perry Mason on the rebound,
Hoping for a 50 share.
Shirley's gone at least two hours
Perhaps the floods have done her in.

Gary Burrows

Tarzan And The Cab

Me, stone; You, Car.
Gurgling cloud
with poison breath.
Pavement's hacking tells
me you've come.

You, Car, great metal god
riding on black balloons
chip my smoothness,
pound my roundness,
crush life from me.

You, Car, Death with tread,
will steam roll me,
stone, into a tarry
grave, darker than Puma's
coat at night.

The Rain That Never Came

The internal clock ticks.
She wakes
To the wet air.
July is the cruelest month
The train is late
Again
Stepping on to an airtight tropical island
Moving 30 miles per hour is
Inhumane.
Subway station smells
Always
"Washington will be the next stop."
Sweat dries by urine infested air
Gliding up toward sea level
She breaths
Coughing.

Lynanne Feilen

Wonderment of the Far Crescent

At that distance
depth does not exist
but for imagined features.

Through the transparent
black of space,
barely discernible

over the brilliant sickle.
Alone but for stars,
another world of shadow.

Another world!

F. Link Rapler

This issue is dedicated to Dr. Evelyn Haught.

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