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Archives

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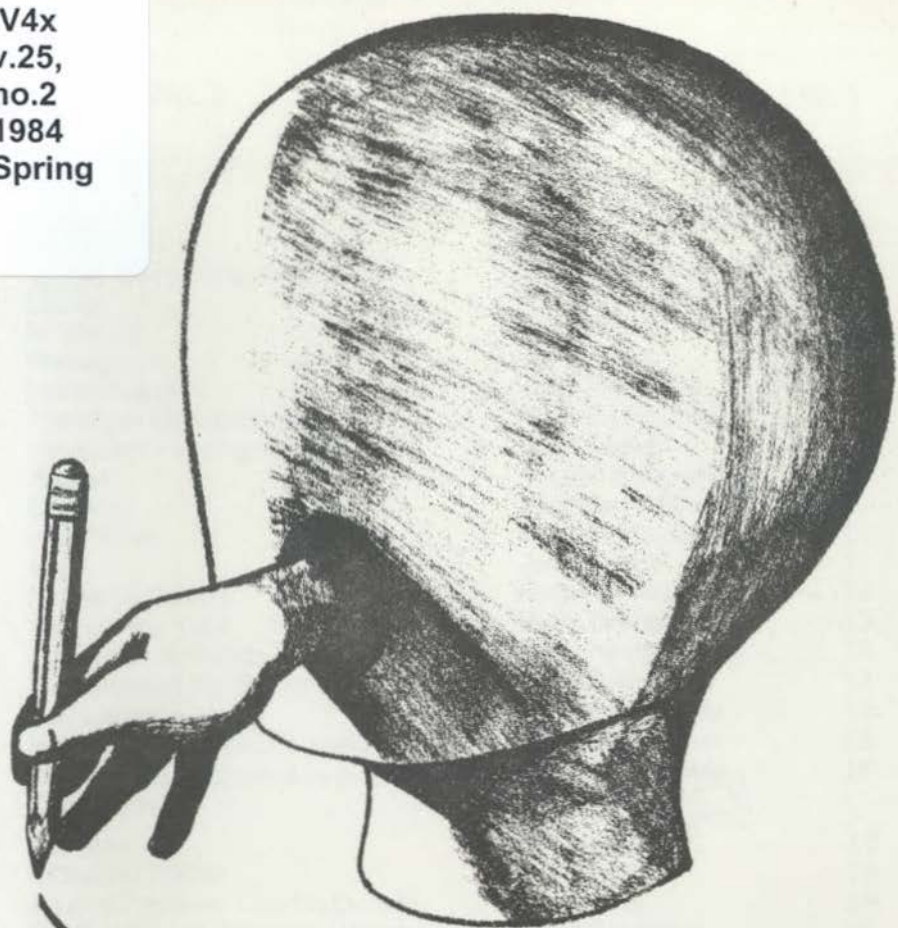
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Spring



VEHICLE

SPRING '84

THE VEHICLE

Vol.25, No.2

Spring 1984

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The Opening

We have gathered
In hushed awe.
We have come
to THE OPENING.
Men in tweed jackets
With leather patches
Puff on their pipes,
Trying to gain the meaning
Of life from the white strip
On the blue background.
Women in high black heels
And rocks on their fingers
Find deep meaning
In the sculpture
That looks vaguely
Like my garbage can.

Kathy Ford

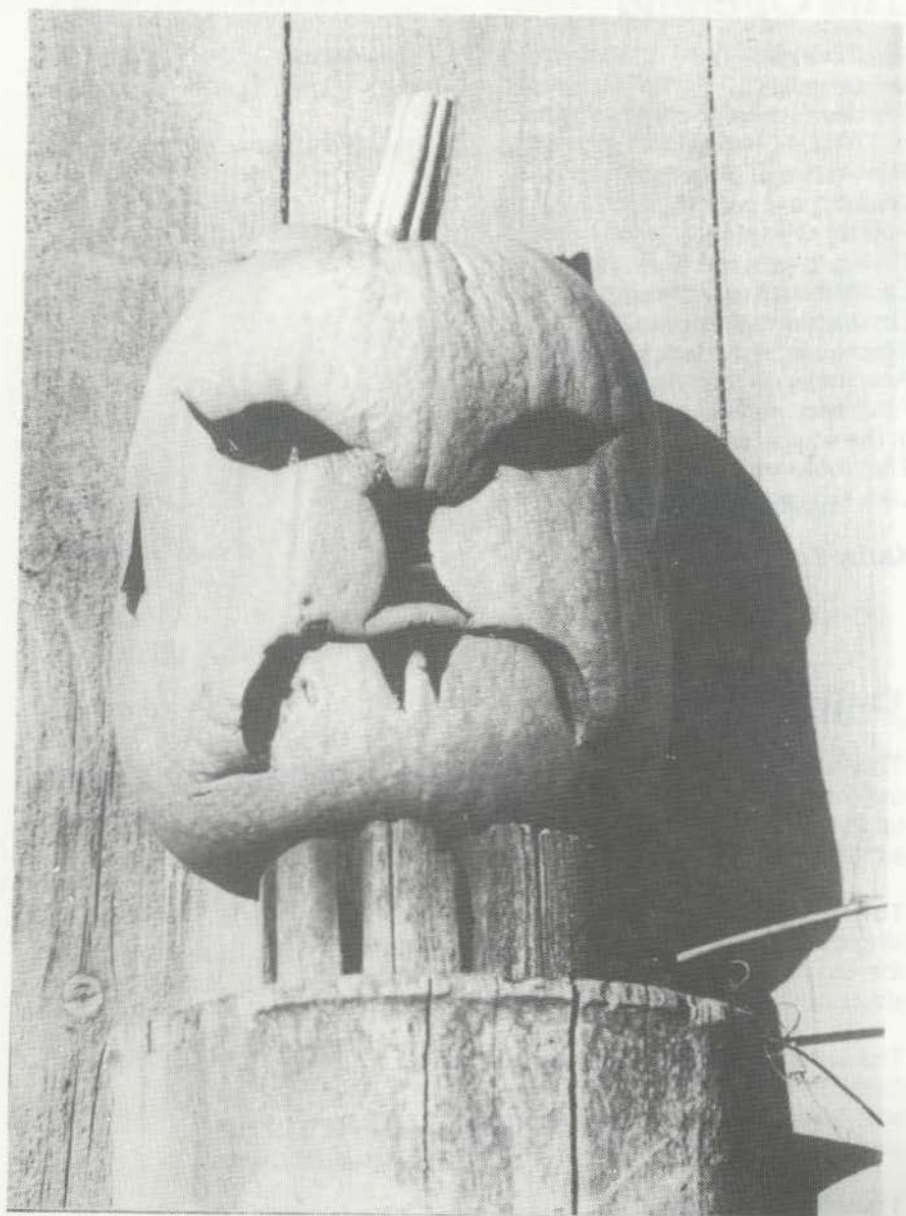
Paint

The lean man's horse down straining oats
out the pasture's stem standing ghosts
up the slim slip moon goes down
as man goes horse round wind swept brown.

The hair broom corn whisp broken tail
sing darkling through sapling night wind gale
the owl horned barn beam hunt begun
slows not man come horse trot run.

The wake gold gleam done harvest song
neck stiff bark snaps winter long
stand lone fence lean man's labor cost
sleep bird night horse dark labor lost.

Thomas B. Waltrip



Lisa Frese

City as Castigating Animal

I am leaving the city now.
The flow of metal rubber wheels
carries me on;
tilted telephone poles dance a crazy semaphore
I'm not familiar with.

Measuring my time in shadows,
the ticking of the fence posts
mirrors a western sun
sinking in an earthen ocean.

Between the umbra and the fire
the feeling lies.
Lost in the language of the city.
Something sets it turning in the morning,
stoking coal in old tin hoppers,
keeps it humming in the night,
taming lines that whip and split.

Let the beast die.
It wants to think for me.
Flagellated madness;
the old thought honing,
I'm leaving, I'm leaving,
longing to read the scrolls
that cling like old clothes
on bleached bones of birches.

Jerry McAnulty

Limits

It's the infinite spider who spins
the web so close to the ground that
it stretches for miles over rusty terrain
and catches the light sifting through
the leaves of some green shrubbery
never touching

A spider who balloons in the brink
of life, swinging between
two fixed branches low to the grass
and who carries with it the power
to hang from the unknown upper bound
never touching

It is the spider who spins so close
to perfection that the droplets on
each spoke are symmetric—a spider
who shrinks from the inside and dies,
leaving a tomb of symbols behind
never touching

Michelle Mitchell

In Silence

Yesterday,
I heard
wind rushing
through the trees
like surf.

Today,
I see only the fog
eating away
the tree tops,
in silence.

Keila Tooley



Lisa Frese

Indian Creek

Ducking through the barbed wire,
the river path yawns wide and dry;
our moccasins crack the latticed floor,
whips of trees
take the paint off your face.
Running through the corn field
stalks are talking,
tattered whispers on brown shoulders.
Drawing the bow of the fence,
I spread the wire for you
and you for me;
we cut our hands on the knot.
pressed together,
our bloods fuse.

Jerry McAnulty

The Right Idea about Rain

So far away are you from me that
for you to come and touch my hand would
be something wonderful and something
I would remember for a long time
because I am anxious for seeing you,
and if we were together at this moment
we would sleep all day wrapped
in one another because it would
be raining as it is right now,
and you would tell me that this
is what people do when it rains
in your hometown, and I would
say that they have the right idea
about rain.

Michelle Mitchell

Van Gogh's Young Male Peasant

Cellophane eyes stare with the
apathy of a dying bird.
Lips tight as
a Bible pressing a flower.
Brow ruffled,
brimmed hat flops, blows, shrugs—
like the shoulders of its weaver.
Head empty and tilted
half awake, half dead:
a pathetic dog in
lollipop clothing—
stands amid licorice grass
and ice cream trees.

Keila Tooley

Abigail

Beneath the statue of Beethoven
at noon, the bag lady
unpacks her lunch;
leaves blowing circles around
the packages at her feet.
On her lap lies a linen napkin,
and crystal and china
are pulled from the folds
of her over-sized coat.
She nibbles first at her cheese,
then sips her wine,
eying the pigeons with contempt
as they peck at the cement
beneath her bench.

Maggie Kennedy

Cleaning

Mother said
among dinner dishes
and potato peels,
that the porch
had to be swept,
and don't forget the walk.

I was always
Mother's little helper,
and her friends knew
that someday I would be
a beautiful young lady.
The dishwasher needed loading
and my room was a mess,
and Mother said
it was too much.

Dad stood watching
in his flannels and slippers
while she packed.

Mother took her pieces
of his bedroom
and parts of his world
and tucked them away
into her suitcased vaults
snapping them closed
to him forever.

Mother said
I was old enough
to keep up with things
and she would still be
my mother, but not Dad's,
and I should keep my room clean.

Jennifer K. Soule

Heat Wave

Like a Skinner Box.
Dirty, stifling midwest town,
rubbing dusty bottles in a lonely basement bar.

Clenched fists of clouds pummel the courthouse tower;
it belches eight bells, borrowed air
from a thousand useless trials,
jailbirds loll in their cages on Seventh Street.

I put the needle in Tom Waits' arm,
crank up some raspy blues,
crave the split of a thunderstorm.
Cockroach plays his fiddle
underground.

Jerry McAnulty

Vigil

As wine is chilled for pleasure by a fire,
A room is insulated from the storm.
The woman sits alone with her desire,
And stares at flames that once had seemed to warm
Her heart, but now it sinks with dying dreams
Of atmosphere and music, poignant, sweet;
And tears are so inadequate, it seems,
To somehow gauge the weight of her defeat.
Discarded flowers decorate the floor,
Their faces turning up, as if to mock—
As false and cheerful as the smile he wore.
The time has come to heal, and to take stock;
But now a footstep's sounding in the yard.
How sad you are, poor heart she cannot guard.

Janet Grace

Hatred of Clowns

His chipped grin was wide and red, sharp in contrast to the black painted thick and heavy around his lips. It stretched for miles, surrounded by a mist of clown white and the blue of the playroom. He grinned with such velocity, blurring back and forth in front of my face. "See Bozo, Shell? See the Clown?" Back and forth in front of my eyes was my daddy's voice painted red and white and black.

Then the static of the chord being pulled by my mommy rang loud and long at the back of its neck. "Don't cry Shell. See the Clown? Hear him talk!" A nasal laugh spurted from the crevice where its head was secured to its neck. "Hiii, I'm Bozo! Hi, I'm Bozo! . . . Hiii, I'm Bozo!" Somewhere in that playroom, all red and white and black and blue swirled around, a scream grew. It fizzled and festered in my throat, beating at the sides of the cavity, making a sharp ache in my jaws. It traveled up and up until it filled the blue playroom from behind the bobbing clown that held on so tightly to daddy's hand.

As the waves of the scream knocked into those blue walls and fell like rabid bats in lighted hallways, that clown grinned. "Hiii, I'm Bozo! . . . Hi, I'm Bozo. . . . I'm Bozo!" His proclamation spilled from underneath his ruffled neck which swayed back and forth in front of me, and he laughed. "Oh, Shell, don't cry. Bozo won't hurt you, Baby." Mommy hugged it, all that blood red and powder white of it as it smiled.

Wide, black arches surrounded his glass black eyes, never blinking, with smudged ice blue on the lids. The catatonic stare somehow mirrored the grin on his mouth, where a plastic half moon of teeth jutted out from his gums. He moved back away from me, still clinging to my daddy's hand with his polka-dotted cape, still looking at me and laughing.

Daddy carried him, with his neck ruffle bouncing, a suitable noose for that hideous, laughing toy about to take its place in the basement. Daddy carried him down the creaking stairs, which pivoted with each of his steps.

He put Bozo into the box that the television came in, pushing him deep inside, letting his cape sneak in between two flower pots draped with spider webs. His flaming red hair spewed over the yellowed lampshades and the mason jars with rusted lids in the box marked "Garage Sale." Daddy put yesterday's news over his painted face.

Bozo's head lolled to the right and to the left as daddy picked up the box to carry it to the back room of the basement where the old shower is. Daddy put the box down on top of the box that holds the artificial Christmas tree, the silver spines in brown, paper tubes waiting to be stuck into a silver stand. Bozo's head lolled again to the right and to the left, as a mason jar lid tugged at his long, white vocal chord. Bozo laughed his last—for then.

Michelle Mitchell

Trees in the Yard

Bald old men
stand
stooped and crouched
in the wind,
wave
stiff arms.
Groping
arthritic bones
scratch and crack
the window's
pane
and grab
children
from their sleep.

Keila Tooley

Lost on Back Roads

The night dark
As the empty space
From which we came,
The rain heavy
As a steel curtain
That drapes the space,
The car
Screaming along
A deserted road,

Adrenalin pumping,
The car screaming louder,
The night darker,
The rain heavier,

Then, something heard
But not seen,

A laugh
A skid
The train.

Tony Mirabelli

The Death of My Father's Hands

Watching you in the frame
of the hallway . . .

your body outlined
by a white stretcher,

your face
illuminated in sweat,

each bead resting in a
row of wrinkled skin,
lined souvenirs of pain.

Waiting to wake
from this cancerous dream,

I watch your fingertips
as they move through the air
in a wave.

That goodbye,
easier to die with
than to live with.

So I try to remember . . .

your two strong hands,
fingers interlaced, stretched palms

into the shape of a swing.

Gina Grillo

Soft Landing

The woman
searches for love
in linen closets,
believing the towels
will cushion the falls.

Maggie Kennedy

Incident in the Generic Aisle

A child of four,
his head a bowl of hair
stares through
spokes of a shopping cart
like a chimpanzee.
Waiting for his mother
to become absorbed
with the greenbeans,
he stretches his hand
between the spokes
smiling as his fingers,
touch the soft cushion
of mini-marshmallows.
Excited, he
mistakes the angle
bringing the bag bouncing
against the cart,
sending marshmallows
sailing through the air
like a heavy snow.
His mother turns,
busy comparing prices
of creamed corn,
and slips, flying
down the aisle
into a display
of jumbo-sized peaches.
The boy watching
safe from his cart
points a bottle
of Fantastik
at the woman lying
stunned on the floor,
"Gotcha," he says.

Maggie Kennedy

Happy Well-adjusted Individuals, Considering

We come to the morning
with a touch and a kiss
and a cat at the end of the bed
purring for breakfast.
I long for coffee,
you, for cinnamon toast.
The shower's steam pulls
in the remaining bitter
of morning light.
Walking up Fourth Street,
we forget not to hold hands,
someone yells from a car,
slowing to get a better look,
"Dykes! Queers!"
I turn to you,
your long dark hair
trailing in the wind.
Sometimes we wave
to reflect the attentions,
or even smile at them.
Oh, how strange we are.

"You must have been beaten as a child,"
as if I were ever struck to the floor,
screaming "I hate you."

Questions come.
Murky imagined scenes:
horrible black-eyed fathers,
mothers with cynical styles.
There is nothing behind me
to warrant such visions.
My parents like me fine
until pictures of my guarded self
escape into conversations,
drawing incoherent responses,
blurred black and white,
while each blames the other
for some absent scene;
they say it would be all right
if it were only someone else's kid.
I say, it's only me, only me.

Don't point. It's rude to stare.
(a hundred lashes for kissing?)
I hear whispers.
They turn away, wave a hand,
shake their heads,
"No."

Should we think how strange we are
when the men next door
threaten with obscenities, leering and gesturing?

We sing our love songs
with the door locked.

We come to the evening
easily forgetting
how strange we are,
when we hold each other
through the night.

Jennifer K. Soule

Old Man

Sitting alone
in a Dairy Queen booth
with a Peanut Buster Parfait.

His face, washed of all color,
framed by a crop of scraggly grey hair,
eyes barely showing through a mask of wrinkles.

Reminds me of a book
with frayed bindings and a dull cover
uselessly sitting on a shelf.

Two boys laughing, from across the room
imitating a coffee cup shaking,
too hard for a sip to be taken.

Sitting alone
he looks at them, and then into his ice cream,
watching it melt.

Gina Grillo

It Doesn't Matter

Day's up...Don't feel like sweating any more
That Foundry stench always smells the same
You just don't feel like doing it again

Head out on that 130
Watch the spillway splash
Swallow down another bottle of warm beer
A cool breeze flows down your back
and the rough concrete itches your feet

Darkness settles in on the silent woods
and mist rises off the murky river
Security lights in the distance give no relief
Loneliness creeps in again
and you prepare to take your final dive

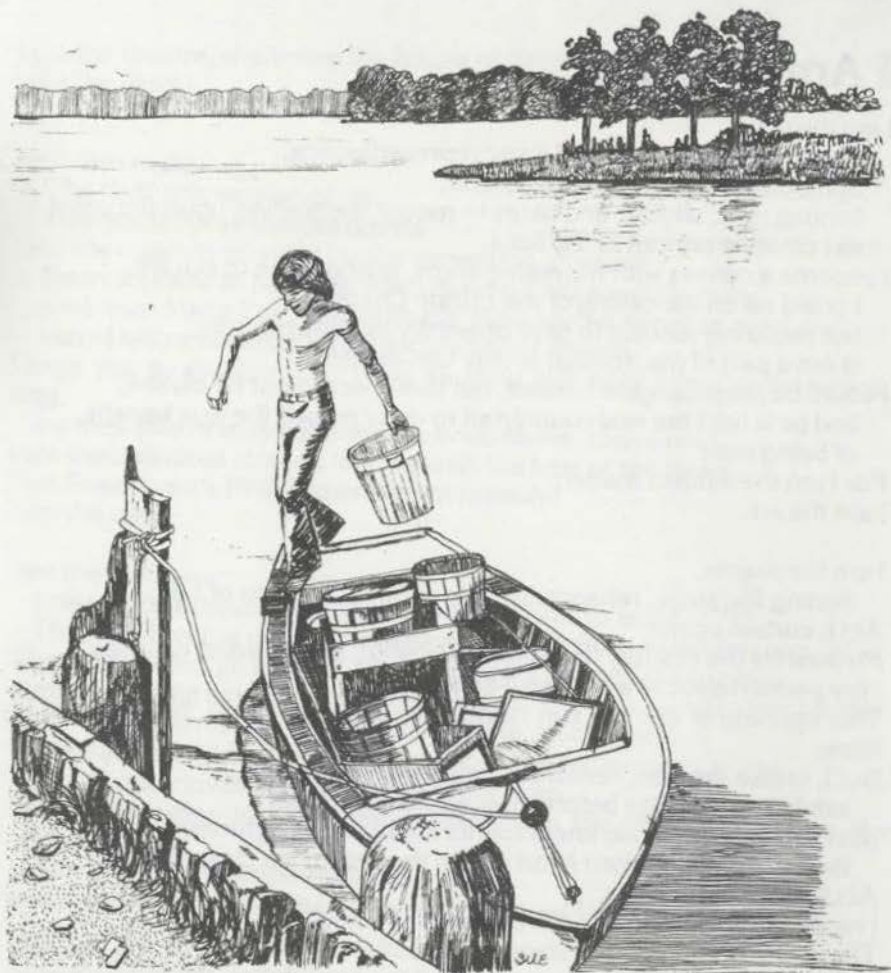
The county boys drag the muddy tomb
but you've finally done something right without messin' it up
They'll never know the empty reasons why
It doesn't matter to them anyway
Cause they're racing out the speedway t'nite
and the fish will be bitin' again tomorrow

Ted Boone

A Love Poem For Charles Donald

Walking across a wet parking lot
I fell into a gasoline rainbow
Once on the other side
I found where they keep the pots of gold
For the ends of all the rainbows.
Seeing an empty one
I carried it home
And made in it split pea soup.

Cathy Moe



David Willey at Wittman Wharf 1980 SUE OILER MILLER

Sue Oiler Miller

I Am the Arts

I am the art,

The visual presentation of inner representations,
Symbolizing the colors of the Mind,
Inviting reds, whites, and blues to mount themselves upon the easel
as I create a portrait of the Soul.

I become a canvas with moveable limbs, giving pulse to still life.

I could be on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel,
but requiring viewers to gaze upwardly as I downwardly,
is not a part of me, for that is only con-artistry.

I could be Michelangelo himself, but then I would not be myself,
and be it not I the real counterfeit to deny myself the true benefit,
of being real;

For I am the subject matter;

I am the art.

I am the drama,

Setting the stage, rehearsing, preparing for the acts of Life.

Act I, curtain opens.

My heart is the drapery that remains unshut, so the world can view
my performance as a human—as a woman.

This opening is like the sun rising, unveiling the dawn, hiding from the
dusk.

But I, unlike the Sun, reveal the secrets of brightness,
exhibiting the stars before awakening darkness.

Just as the death of darkness marks the birth of brightness,
the birth of an opened Mind marks the death of a closed Heart.

Act II, soliloquy begins.

I recite my lines as learned, with Truth as my only prop.

The scene is that of man, starving himself from the Truth; crash dieting;

Only permitting his system to digest the hyperboles, the euphemisms;
and the unverifiables.

This stage will not be used as a platform to promote this growing
state of malnutrition.

I shall "intra-brain-iously" feed the Truth to my listeners.

Then when Judgment Day comes on opening night,
what critic would dare to degrade such a performance?

Would I be offended by him who ridiculed Shakespeare for making
Othello merely a hero?

Or will I be defended by him who vindicated Aristotle, for greatly orating
the Truth.

Well, I fear thee not.

I, the genuine actress, reciting the lines of immortality.

I serve as a conjunction that joins Truth and Feeling;

The Tracks, directing the trains of Thought;

The Laughter, making ears smile;

The Teardrops, making eyes frown.

I am the theatre, sheltering the house of Feeling;
I am the drama.

I am the music,
The rhythmic version of art;
The lyrical conversion of drama.

I am the creation of notes for the recreation of sound;
From soprano to baritone; from quarter note to whole note;
And from Me to You, I transmit the most sacred sanction of sound,
varied with a cadence for its spontaneous delight.

I urge you to employ your Mind as ears, and truly listen to the songs I
sing,

be they solo or in symphony; for boundaries, I have not.

I am the unlimited stream, flowing with the beat of the Heart.

I am Beethoven's Fifth Dimension to melody;

I am the music.

I am the literature;

The words, providing sentences with motives to exist;

The alibi, inviting personal interpretations to frolic in the foreground.

When the senses go to work, the imagination comes out to play,
emancipating; reading from its chore-like verdict—and to this I testify.

With this freedom, I add the possible to the improbable;

Providing the link from the pluralistic to the esoteric;

Forming the invisible chains extending from

the sandcastles to the Eiffel Tower; from the Pacific Ocean to the
Atlantic;

From the Renaissance to the New Wave.

I am to creative writing what Paris was to Ernest Hemingway,

I am "A Moveable Feast";

I am the literature.

Yes, I am the Arts.

I can be anything I so choose, but can we not all be?

Would Michelangelo's art be great could you not see it?

Would Shakespeare's drama be great could you not relate to it?

Would Beethoven's music be great could you not listen to it?

Would Hemingway's literature be great could you not read it?

We are the ingredients to the recipe for creating greatness.

If a great future is desired for us, it must be inspired by us,

And only then will Tomorrow deliver as much magnificence as did

Yesterday,

For Today, the Arts.

Brenda Renee Drummer

Mothers and Daughters

It was my nineteenth birthday. My sister Jamie and I were on our way to meet our mother at a Mexican restaurant for dinner. To Mom, it was a chance to see her daughters before they went back to college. To me, it was another ritual of celebration for a meaningless birthday. To Jamie, it was a confrontation with a mother she was afraid of because of her past problems with her, and her present problems without her.

"I don't want to talk about any of it with her," Jamie was saying. "I won't. Not without protection. If she wants to talk about it, she can come down to where I live and talk about it with my therapist there. We need a mediator. I know what will happen. She'll cry, or she'll make me feel guilty. . . ."

"She's not going to do anything tonight. We're just going to have a nice, short dinner; and then we'll leave," I said.

"Have you noticed how agreeable she's been to me about everything?" Jamie asked, not expecting an answer. "She knows, she knows. And she feels so bad."

"Is that what you want?" I asked. She didn't answer. "She's not a bad person. She helps people. She's good with people."

"She's good with other people. She can be, because they know how to feel. They know how to really love their kids. They don't think; they really 'feel' it. She knows how to tell them how to deal with what she never could."

Maybe she was right. In my mother's work, she helps other families with their problems; it was ironic that our family was immensely problematic. I pictured mother as I had seen her many times, sitting in the kitchen when I got home from school.

I could tell when she had been crying. She would sit in the shadows of afternoon light with a kleenex in her clenched fist. She wouldn't talk. I would ask her what was wrong, and she would say, "Nothing."

Jamie was nervously maneuvering the car through the rush-hour traffic. I wondered if Mom would be there when we arrived. She had said something about a meeting and a tight schedule, but that she would cancel her later appointments so we could have time together. There was always time. Since she had moved out three years earlier, she had become very involved with her work. She had tried to make it seem that she would be closer to us even though she wouldn't be living with us. She had said, "I want you to know that I'm not leaving you; I'm leaving your father. I'll still be your mother."

The day she left, Dad came into my room and told Jamie and me there was something they wanted to talk to us about. We were sure we were in big trouble about something. We had no idea. "I think you know what it is, don't you?" Mom had asked. Jamie and I looked at each other with raised eyebrows. "I think you know," she repeated. We didn't; but after she left, it made perfect sense—to us, though not to Dad.

"It was all so fake," Jamie said, bringing me back to the present. "You're such a pretty little girl. . . you're a very special person," she said, mocking the words Mom used to tell us when we were little. "I know that

you believed it, and that's good because you got what you needed then. But I didn't."

I remembered how good it had felt to hear those words. I felt so privileged that Mom would hold me on her lap and tell me she loved me. But I never could say it back. Why, I wondered, wasn't it until two years after she left that I could say "I love you" to her? Maybe Jamie was right; we would all think instead of feel. Had I learned to feel?

When we got to the restaurant, Mom wasn't there. Jamie hadn't wanted to come at all; and if it weren't my birthday, I doubt she would have. We sat in the lobby, looking around for Mom. I looked at my sister, her long blonde hair, her near-to-perfect features, her slim figure, her tasteful clothes. Behind all of that, I could never tell what emotions were raging inside her. I knew it was a difficult time for her; she was facing change. I hoped that, for once, she would allow the change to happen, and let things straighten out. I wanted to understand; I wanted her to be happy. I couldn't, though, want her to be right. Was it true that there was no love between Mom and Dad, or between Mom and us, or even between Jamie and me? We had never gotten along as children. I always thought she had hated me. Dad never showed his emotions beyond a gentle pat on the back or a smile.

Finally, Mom walked in. She wore her long hair up. She moved with her usual style, smiling when she saw us. She said hello to both of us, but immediately her attention was on Jamie. It had been months since they had seen each other; and besides what news I relayed to her, Mom didn't know what was going on with Jamie, except that there was anger. They had talked on the phone, but Jamie had never let on to what she was feeling. Somehow Mom sensed it. She knew something.

"Happy Birthday," she said, handing me a card and a small box. I knew that wasn't the reason we were there. "How are you doing?"

"Pretty good."

"How does it feel to be nineteen?"

"I don't know. Not too different."

"I can't believe the baby of the family is growing up," she said with a real feeling of surprise. We knew none of us were children any more. We had to face each other as adults, which made it harder for my mother to deal with us. She was the type of mother that always wanted us to discuss our feelings. She never got to upset with me, though she and Jamie had fought a lot. She had wanted to know what was going on, what we were feeling, how we were dealing with our problems. She had made it seem as though she understood. In spite of everything, I still believed that she did.

I had been proud of her. I had wanted all of my friends to meet her. They could talk to her about anything, and they usually did. But it had all changed now. We had our separate lives. We could bring only pieces of ourselves to each other, and we chose which pieces.

We were seated at a small table. I sat opposite Jamie, with Mom to my left between us. She asked if we wanted a drink, which was very unusual. I ordered one, though Jamie ordered a soft drink, which was also unusual. For a few minutes we just sat there, looking over the menu.

Jamie kept looking up at me. She was scared. She wanted to confront Mom, but she was afraid of the guilt, the tears, and the anger. Mom was obviously contemplative. She didn't say anything for a while.

"Tell me about your job—what do you do, exactly," she asked Jamie.

"I work in the children's ward at a home where they keep wards of the state. Most of the people are deformed or disabled. It's pretty bad. It's not clean; they don't have enough supplies."

As Jamie described her work, I could see the genuine caring she felt. I admired her for her courage to face such ugliness. She had been working in different nursing homes for a few years. I thought of the time I went with her when she worked at a home for the aged. She took me around, into their rooms, introducing me. "This is my little sister!" she would say. When she walked into their rooms, they lit up, smiling. The most striking image I remembered of that day was when we walked into one room to find a man just sitting in a chair, unmoving. "Hi Joe!" she said to him. "How are you today?"

"Jamie!" he said, as he held out a hand that she took in both of hers. She said once again that I was her little sister.

"Just relaxing? Have you eaten yet?"

"No, I'm not hungry," he said, still smiling, staring. After we had left him, she told me that he was blind.

Mom was asking Jamie where she would be living when she went back down to school.

"Some friends of mine have a house. I'll be living there."

"That sounds nice. How about you?" she asked me. "Have you gotten all you need for your apartment? Have you heard about your loan?"

"Yes, to question number one; no, to question number two." I didn't want to talk about my lack of money.

In two days, we would both be gone, moving back once more to our own worlds, away from each other. I realized I hadn't said much of anything during the whole meal; and hadn't been paying attention either. I looked up to meet Jamie's eyes that seemed to be crying out to me as she had done once before.

She had called one night, a few weeks earlier, when I was home alone. At first, I couldn't tell who it was, because she was crying so hysterically. I thought something terrible must have happened.

"Jamie? What's wrong; what's the matter?"

"I...I don't know," she managed to say. "I haven't been able to cry. I can't feel anything, I can't." She was crying louder now, still trying to talk. "My therapist told me, if I could cry, I needed to have someone who cared there. That's why I called. Are you alone?"

"Yes." I was confused by what she was telling me. She was still crying.

"God, you don't know. I've been in therapy...I can't feel things...there's a part of me that takes over, blocks it all out...it's taken a long time to be able to cry. . . it's so hard."

I didn't know what to do or what to say. I was silent.

"When I was little, Mom never loved me. She never took care of me. I never felt like anyone loved me. I still don't."

"That's not true," I insisted.

"Yes it is!"

"I love you."

"No. You don't. You don't either. Do you know what it feels like to love someone?" She had suddenly stopped crying, too suddenly. "You don't understand. I don't know why I called you. I've got to go."

"Yes I do. . . wait, don't hang up." I was afraid she was too upset to be alone. I struggled with what I should say. "I think I know what it feels like."

"What do you feel like when you say it? It's like...oh God, I don't know. I can't explain it; it's a certain feeling you get."

As she spoke, she somehow convinced me. I realized that I too blocked my emotions. I didn't know if I had that feeling or not. It couldn't be that Mom hadn't loved her. I had never thought of it all in that way. I felt drawn to Jamie, as if we had in common the inability to stop rationalizing our feelings.

"When I was a baby, I had that intestinal problem—remember?"

"Yes." I remembered Dad saying how Jamie had cried virtually non-stop for months.

"Mom couldn't take it. She gave me to her friends to take care of me. She gave me away!"

"It was hard for her."

"If it were my child, I would hold her no matter how much she cried—I wouldn't give her away!"

"I don't know Jamie, I don't know what to say. She loved you; she did."

"That's not all. That's just one thing. I can't tell you all of it, there's too much."

"Every mother loves her child; she can't help it."

"Okay, okay, maybe she did. But I never felt loved. She should have made me feel it. I never felt loved, ever. And now I can't feel anything! Things happen, and I just block it out. Part of me takes over, like now, like right now."

I thought about how I had dealt with emotions. "I do it too," I said, "when Mom left—all the time."

"Oh God," she said, in a way that showed both fear and relief.

As I had looked across the table at her, she had just looked back, not saying anything in words. None of it was said. We all just sat there avoiding what we were afraid of; we chose the pieces of ourselves that we could use for avoidance. Whatever it was we needed to hear from each other, we couldn't say or know why we said it, so we silenced our uncertainty.

As we left the restaurant, Mom hugged each of us before saying good-bye. Walking to our car, I turned to see her still watching us, the wind at her back, surrounding her and making her seem set apart and still. She lifted a hand to wave, and I waved back as Jamie fumbled with the keys to her car.

Scratches

In the purple dark
bruised into night,
She feels the heavy breathing
of her grandson,
far into dreaming.

She creeps inside and
fills his mind with scratches
from times when rustwater spurted
from the dry well-pipe,
coughing the pump into exhaustion.

And the pink-bodied rabbits
huddled blind and hungry,
waiting for his father's knife
to strip away the thickened fur.

Bringing the blood-brown meat to him,
He almost sees the way she looked before
she took her place in the worm-bored crate,
wrapped in the damp earth
But before he can, she wakes him.

Michelle Mitchell

Sedative

Long-legged crickets sing outside my window,
Think they some big dazz band.
Tell my shoes, "C'mon boys; let's dance!"
I say, "I'm goin' to bed."
Then the bullfrogs, they start up!
Thinks I won't gig 'em if they keep me up,
Huh! I shut the window.
But I beat my goosefeathers to death
Waitin' on that damn sandman,
So I lift the glass and holler,
"Saw them legs, crickets! Sing
Ya little pond scums!"
And shore nuff, that sandyman,
He drifted in with the tunes.

Stacey Flannigan

Calloused Hand

The sun filters
Through like
A kaleidoscope
Of color,
Penetrating deep.
Dew clings as tenaciously
As the faint heartbeat
Laboring noiselessly
Painfully,
In a body
Stiffening with
Exhaustion.
The world shakes,
Steadies,
And shakes again.
Death approaches,
Vile and
Unavoidable.
Abruptly
The suspended world
Is terminated
By one calloused hand—
Spider, prey,
And all.

Janet Grace

Cool Cat

Never had a name
To strut— just his tail.
Paw-picked his way up
My couch every morning,
Thought he'd crash for
Awhile.
Weren't no street-wise
Sass or house-bred
Sissy...
Just did it his own
Way.
Slink always had
Real class.

Stacey Flannigan

For My History Teacher, Miss Wilhelm

Continual changes
These days.
Less emphasis
On written expression
Unless it's a real Apple.
Doing everything for us,
Those machines.
Fighting wars,
Hot or cold
Makes no difference
Nothing wrong
In new ideas,
Until there's nobody
To teach the children
About Bo Diddley.

Cathy Moe

Short Poem for Chris's Eyes

I cannot remember the color
of your eyes, maybe blue or green

it bothers me that I've lost
the tone of your look.

and when I sent you a photo
of myself—two photos—

they meant I have forgotten
the image has blurred
one last sigh on the tip of my tongue.

I feel a slow rhythmic churning
in my voice, a flutter of air,
its sudden displacement.

Bob Zordani

Missing

(For K.D.F.)

Plaster worn away clings to the wall
by the bed where your fingers
go over and over and over the cracks,
because he won't be holding the pale
half moons of your shoulders for awhile,
making your legs beat time on pavement
that cackles like laughter on summer runs,
making you want to take the humming
apathetic drone of the locusts' wings
and hold it high above their heads,
dropping their curved song and shattering it
until the wing beats are scattered
all over the top sand of the freshly oiled road,
because he won't be touching the white,
warm curves of your neck for awhile,
making you want to pluck the bark
from the dog who's found it so
interesting that you run at night,
and to hold the sound above his head
to toss in the nearest creek,
a plaything for crayfish coming from
their muddy tunnels to pick
at the sound's gray carcass,
because he won't be holding the limber,
warm fingers of your hand for awhile,
making you want to pull his voice
from the phone when he calls
and to lift it carefully, like lifting
the perfect blue robin's egg
found whole in the yard,
and to take it onto your moist palm
into the dark plaster of your room
and to hold it there against you
because it glows in the dark.

Michelle Mitchell

Over There

(for Ernest H.)

"The arms are fair,
When the intent of bearing them is just."

So funny...

Names, histories unknown, we wait in
Silent closets for the games to begin.
The trench separates yet holds
Umbilically our strength and fear.
We are the holy veterans of madness
with nothing to say.

Henry's arm scrapes at my leg as it
Hangs stiff from the wall, a bone-dry flagpole
Begging for symbols to raise.
Seven brothers keep Henry safe,
Eight debts poking me like thorns God wrought
for the Wonder-head.

At last you rise to spy me
and shed a universe in doing so.

But why so close?
I can see your eyes shine—deep set and blue
as a Rembrandt, a fresco.
Still

You must die

And I shall blow kindly, lovingly
on church candles
later
in memory of your just, murdered
soul (if you have one—I wasn't told).

Rifle raised, I feel nothing,
My starved hands wear Inquisition gloves.
I see the stubble on your chin, its fuzzy rake
of Usher sadness.
Too late you know your mistake.

A barely audible click sends the lead in flight
across our Mother...spider-like, it comes.
One never hears it.

The eternal moment again ends in a shiver,
Head pieces flying to escape their womb of smarts.
Your broken Homeric frame settles the grim dust.
Empty puppet, the dance is done.

Now I rest, Henry doesn't mind.

My duty is finished
My freedom secure

So funny...
To dole out death as cigarettes from a
muddy coffin.

Graham Lewis

Strange Bedfellows

In the pale spotlight
of the new morning,
the blind-deaf girl
turns suddenly in her sleep,
twisting her blanket
into a knot
about her ankles.

Having only blackness
and silence as guides,
she brushes her arm
against the sharp, pin-like scales
of some unseen monster;
his breath hot and
sour on her face.

She breathes softly now.
Wisps of hair lying
damp against her brow,
as she dreams of crunching
snow into angels,
new flakes falling
cold against her cheek.

Maggie Kennedy

Retired Plumber

Sunday afternoons
at the Wako Rest Home
Homer Waldorf
putters to the supply closet
in the 40 watt dark,

Whips out his Sears Pipe Wrench Set
from beneath molding mops
knocking over Vicks, sitting
on a can of floor wax,
working the pipe.

Awkward sounding ratchet
ticks away the circular seconds,
his smile traveling,
he glides the silver elbow,
sliding out the shower nozzle,

And there. . .
in all her bony eighty years,
revealed through the nozzle opening,
Elvira Hammersmidt
strutting her stuff, looking

like a pelican in a flowered
shower cap, her hair
beside her on the bench,
fleshy pancake makeup
streaming down a veined gullet,

She squawks out
"Baby Makes Her Blue Jeans Talk,"
in the stereo shower,
Toilet scrubber for a microphone,
for a stage, a drain.

Michelle Mitchell

Rumors of War Dead

We sit
Waiting
That's the hardest part—
Waiting.
Each time the phone rings
We hold our breath—
Breathing again
When it's just someone wanting to know
If we have heard.
Days pass.
We watch the news
At twelve, six and ten,
Watching as the staring eye
Of the camera
Sends pictures of bodies
In neat rows—wrapped
In black plastic bags.
We wonder
Could that one
Lying in the mud
Belong to us?
We wait
Afraid to get the mail
"I'll be home soon."
But death travels faster
Than the U.S. mails.

Kathy Ford

Night Lights

Nasal winds
carry mingled voices
through the fluorescent street light's buzz.
As crickets chirp degrees,
evening hums to a muddled clammer.

Keila Tooley

Fish on the Train Tracks

Like the slow curve of my forearm
lying severed on the ties,
my fingers are its nimble tail
still slapping on the iron rail.

First tanned,
then belly white,
it rolls
a few more feet
like a broken wheel.

Head is hard round steel,
plastic lips pout pitifully,
shooting mute cries.
its eyes
strangely anaesthetic
in this thin world.

Jerry McNulty

Daddy

His clients say,
"He's respectable,
a real success."
In the morning
only I know him:
sweating blood eyes
yesterday's clothes.
Bottle of Chivas Regal—
an extension of his hand.
Skid row drunkard
in a three piece suit.

Keila Tooley

A Message to the Messenger

Mercury, here and gone,
delivering your messages
to those who have not asked for them.
a quicksilver lover,
changing from warm to cold,

Disappearing again
before anyone can touch
the warm flesh beneath the gilded robes.
You steal from the souls of those who do not know you,
reading in their eyes
the things you let no one see in your own.

Messenger god,
in all your blazing passion
you believe this picture you have painted is real.
Slow your fast and furied pace;
discover what you feel.
Searching deeply for the things you say you have no time for,
no heartless god could ever know
the gentle fire of your soul.

Like the Mercury you long to be
'you're free to fly
away from me.
But the wings that provide you
with the power of flight
are the chains of empty solitude
alone in the night.

Your gilded robes are gone now;
only the man remains.
He can learn the promise of sharing the night—
all the things he's searching for,
the warmth that is his right.
Or he could create another myth,
portray another lie,
and live his cold, lonely life
imprisoned by his flight.

Amy Eades

Dancing Alone

Dancing alone in the bitter light
is like turning around and jumping
with terror at no one there.
No one there to guide or calm when
the torment becomes so great the
soul shatters from its mass.
From its mass, thoughts become clumps
of hardness that forever inhabit
the body, forever petrified.
Forever petrified, a never-successful
struggle to keep enduring,
because the dance is alone.

Kathy Bower

Hands

Slumped,
against the hard
mahogany of the
church pew,
the old man
reads his hands
like a scripture.
The blue rivers
of his veins
twist their way
over the loose,
transparent flesh,
etched by wrinkles,
that crisscross each
other like streets
on a roadmap.
Slowly, he folds
together the covers
of his hands,
safe now that he
has made the right turn.

Maggie Kennedy

The Key to the Ladies' Room

He spits his "Good Evening"
onto the greased concrete,
kicks a blackened boot
at the buzzing coke machine,
"It takes quarters,"
Dents a can of Mr. Pibb
knocked down by the kick.
Leaves it
in the plastic pocket.
Tells Ed about his trip,
about Graceland,
about seeing Elvis' father even.
Hasn't seen his own. . .
in five years,
about that waitress on I-90
"Who could really serve coffee."
Grinds his cigarette
onto the floor.
Winks one eye.
Hands me the key
pinched between oiled nails,
"S'around back."

Michelle Mitchell

Crashing the Blue

I want to take a float
In the stratosphere—
Skyjack till I'm bored;
I'll poke my arm through clouds,
Thumb my nose at birds,
(I might even spit on you!)
I'll tickle the tush of some
God-minded angel—
Just to see if she will cuss,
Then I'll moon the Little Dipper
And laugh till all the stars turn pink.

Stacey Flannigan

The Cradle Will Fall

Eyes wide and mind sleeping,
your tears smooth the edge
where your hands are slipping,
hearing the splash from below.

Your Mommy's calling lullabies
from her cell, six feet under,
her arms cross strapped.
Rock-a-bye baby in the tree. . .

You listen in the safe dark
with ice trays for sky
and a padded, white lawn.
White's your shade.

"When the wind blows,"
white shines fluorescent
behind the kings and queens on cards,
the colors of your pills;

The pills that calm the voices,
the people in your mouth
who share your ward
and smile glass smiles.

Take a walk. Take your shock.
"And when the bow breaks,"
fall off the curb into Europe
"Cra-dle and all."

Michelle Mitchell

One Island

Gulls wander overhead
like lost angels. Feathers
drop and roll like tears
down the cheek of sunset,
into the water. Sailing
together—one island of
floating feathers.

Keila Tooley



Black Walnut Point 1980

SUE OILER MILLER

Sue Oiler Miller

Serendipity

(for D. Miller)

The moon is most clear.
Light sea, boneyard...
Patron Saint of the material split.

Unblinking eye, who invented you?
Who bade you invade me and
spy my closets?
Who carved the concentric circles
of time upon your brow and set you up there,
alone,
to create savage ghosts in the night?

I don't know about you, Moon.
I don't know what you see.
I only know you laugh at the jokes
we make of things themselves,
While all the time illuminating the
darkness under our eyes.

Moon...
Go home,
Hide in the blind daylight.

Graham Lewis

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