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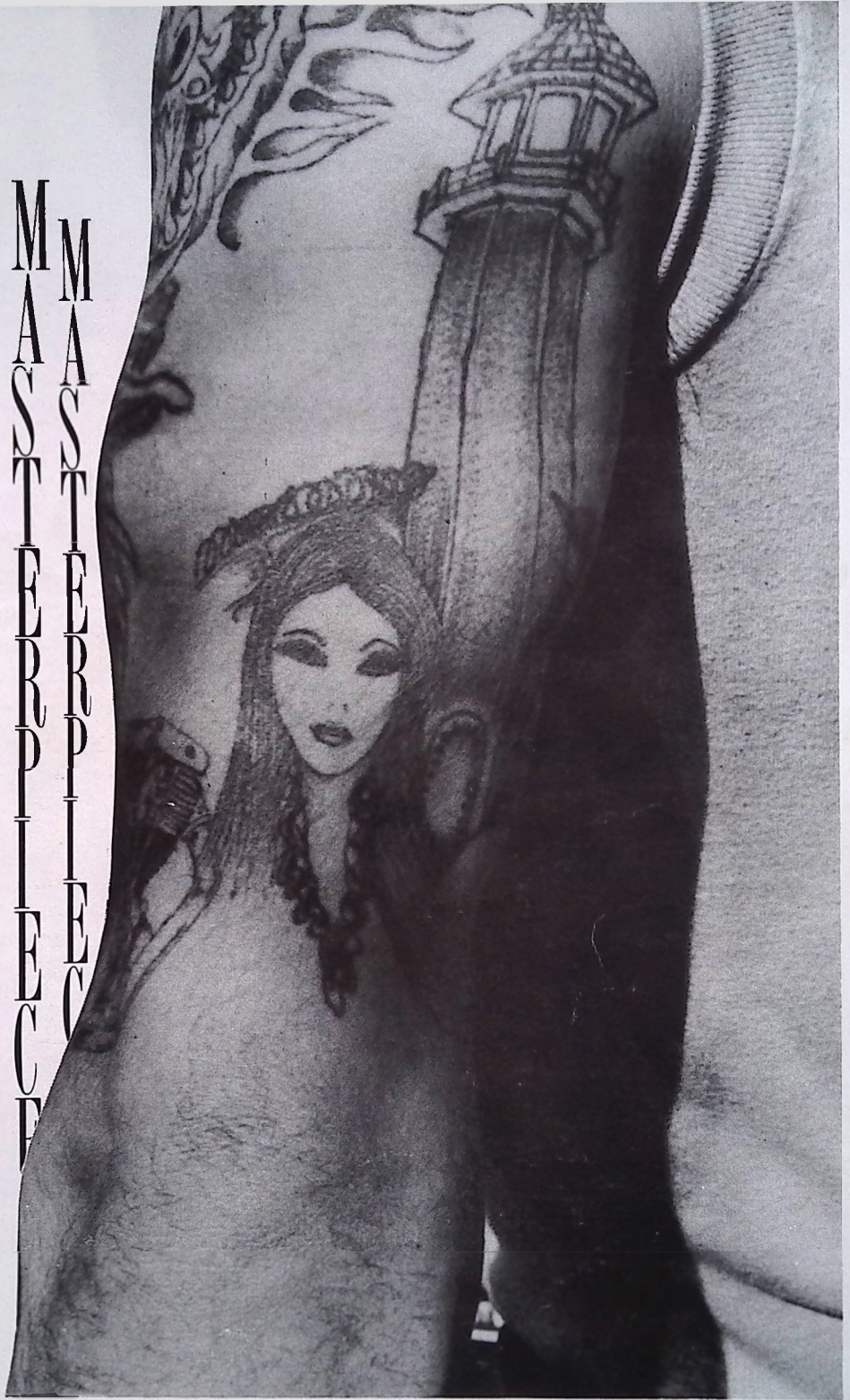
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University of Missouri-St. Louis, "Litmag 1987-88" (1988). *Litmag*. 11.
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-Sharon Suey



—Dave Dickman



—Sharon Saeey

To the Reader (you ambiguous entity, you):

The fifth annual UM-St. Louis Literary Masterpiece is now in your hands. Don't it make you wanna shout?

I hope this issue represents at least a semi-departure from last year's production. For one thing, you have my beautiful, editorial face in the above picture. The odd people in the picture with me are Katie Vale (assistant editor, vice president, domestic goddess) and Sharon Saeey (creative consultant, wife). The guy by himself is a true rebel without a cause, Mr. Norman Welch (treasurer, potential editor).

Me? I'm the good-looking one in the tie.

Of course, we have OTHER grand innovations. In the ensuing photographs for instance, you will find a nice addition—people. I noticed that the last two issues lacked a certain life. They lacked human bodies.

Also, I believe our *tone* is different than last year's. We're angrier. Much more *pissed off*. I think it's an attractive quality.

Finally, we couldn't print everything. There was a lot of good, good, GOOD stuff. Here's a list of honorable mentions:

1. "Closet Fray"—by Pam Hosler
2. "Unwelcome Vision"—by Ron Johnson
3. "The Purpose of Authority"—by Scott Morgan

That's about it. Special thanks to Swanson and Associates, Gribble Printing, Shaughnessy-Kniep-Hawe Paper, and Dennis "Madman" Bohnenkamp.

I love you all.

Remember, if you read quickly, it won't hurt.

Pete Abel

Auxiliary Staff

Jim Meyer

Diana Harvestmoon

Chris Strube

Nancy Freeman

Cathi Koch

Eileen Carlson

THE *ILLUSION*

Unwillingly suspended for all time in my
assailant's grasp,
I have been cursed by my mortal maker
to weep in marbled silence.

Yet, without understanding,
you continue to celebrate my Baroque Beauty:

Look! How serene is her visage.
Her skin is as smooth as pearl rinds!
And see how plush are her lips and breasts.
Her limbs flow like the danseuse absorbed in melody.

She is so accurate—like flesh and blood!

Is it that I have been hoisted
so high upon my pedestal—
or that my chiseled features
are so dazzling—
that you cannot see
the crime before you?

Were I truly the flesh and blood
you imagine,
you would sooner abandon life
than watch the desecration
of the sublime.

The groan of my limbs—
bent against their nature—
would cause your own limbs
to throb in sympathy.

Your eyes
would leap from their sockets
to escape
the horror of my flesh being rent.

The screams
buried in my bowels
would bellow forth
until you succumbed to deafness.

You must learn to see me
with the eyes of Reason.

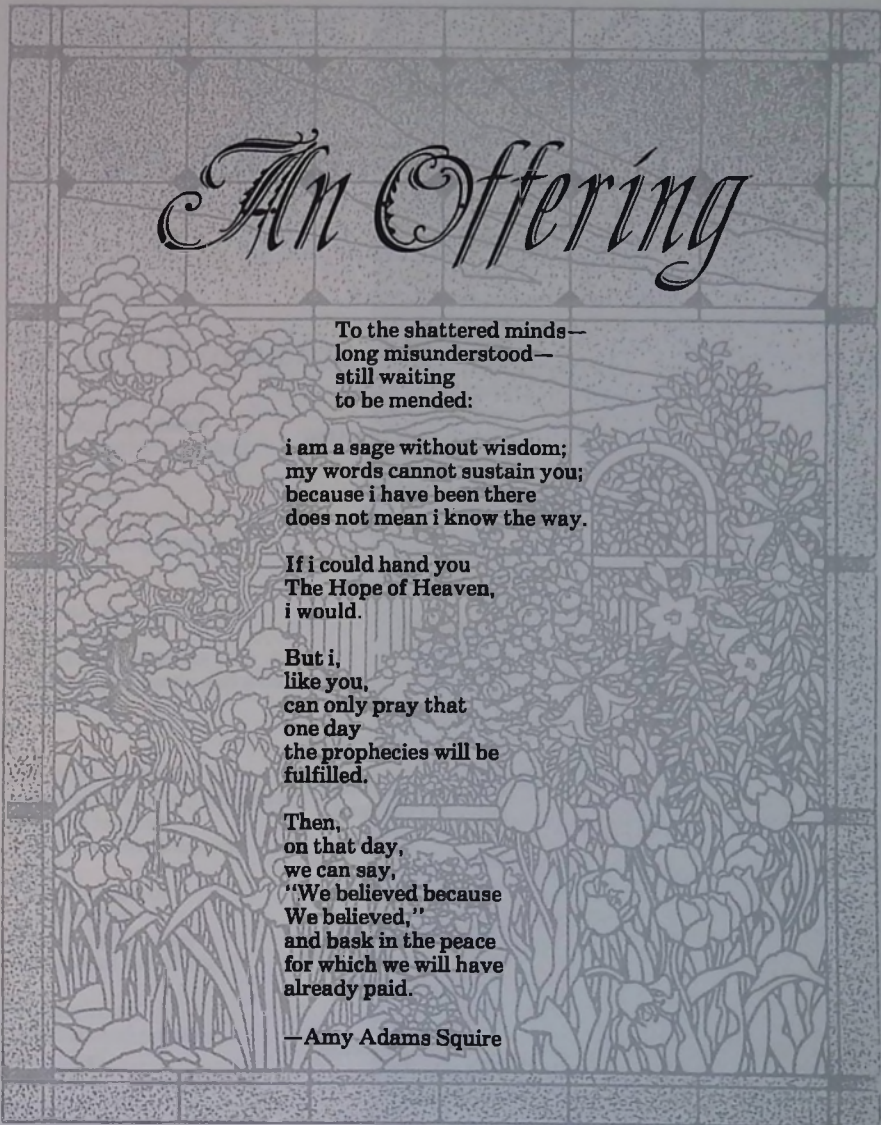
It is not the Rapture you adore.

It is the Rape.

—Amy Adams Squire



—Sharon Saey



An Offering

To the shattered minds—
long misunderstood—
still waiting
to be mended:

i am a sage without wisdom;
my words cannot sustain you;
because i have been there
does not mean i know the way.

If i could hand you
The Hope of Heaven,
i would.

But i,
like you,
can only pray that
one day
the prophecies will be
fulfilled.

Then,
on that day,
we can say,
"We believed because
We believed,"
and bask in the peace
for which we will have
already paid.

—Amy Adams Squire

in the dream house

spider-legged
across my pillow
his coarse
grey-black hair
spreads out
head tilted back
too far
mouth gaping rotten
brown toothed
foam dried and
crusting at the
stubbled corners
of his ended and
unending scream
his
unresilient
cooling flesh
smelling
of the
deathswat
on my sheets but this
is not
the part that woke me
ridged curled and
crying
that
was when
he came
behind me in the
empty hall eyes grey
sunken marbles
mouth
still gaping
jaw-breaking wide
and called me
daughter

—Diana Harvestmoon

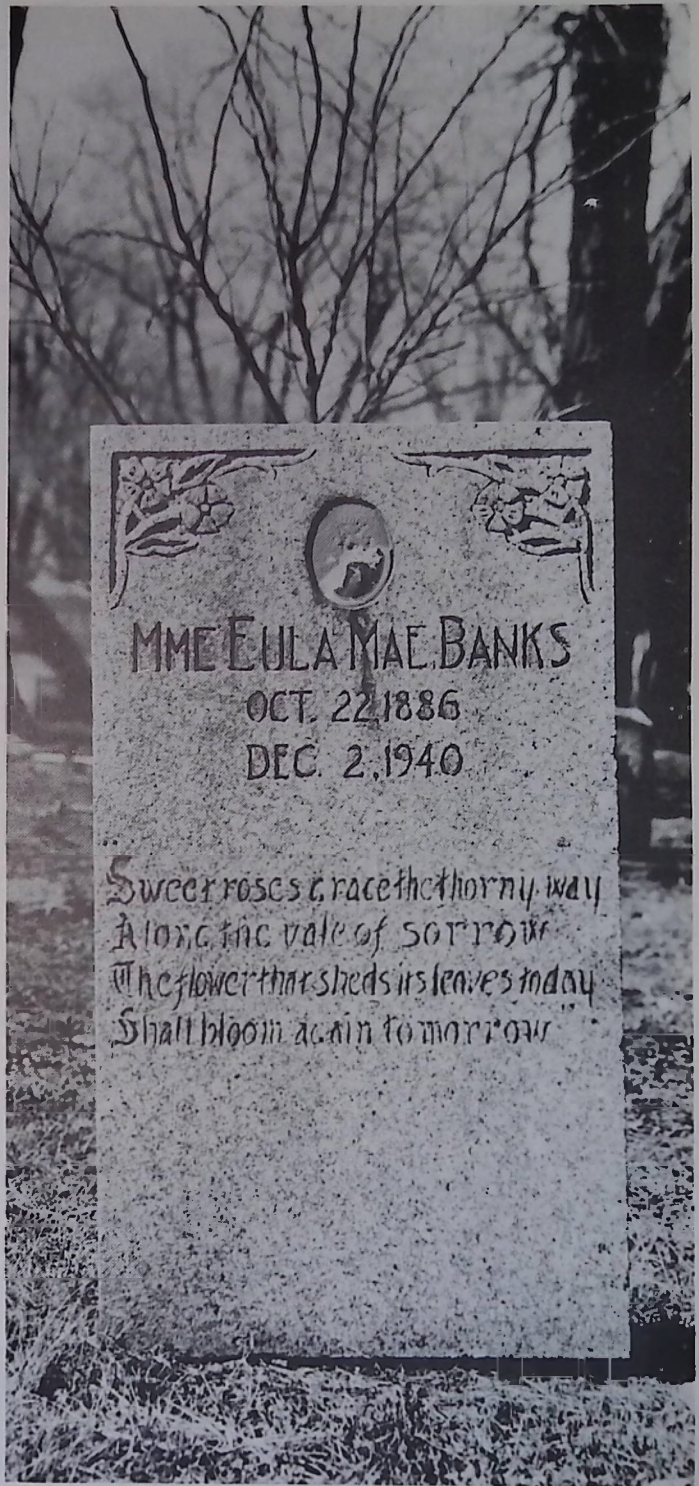
Dear Grandma

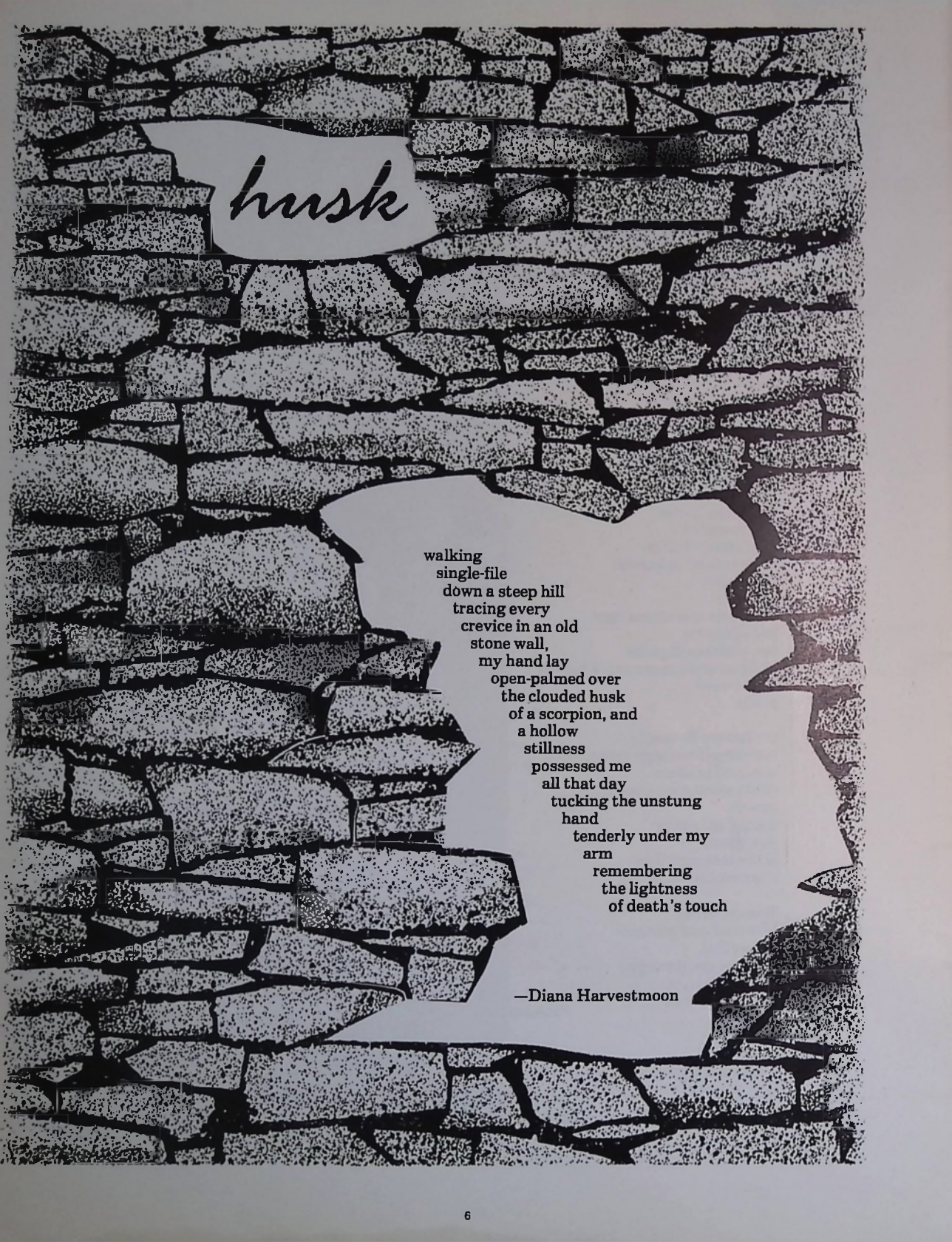
my letters to you lay
in shocked residence
beside a leather-pouched
tarot, the Tower
half revealed
foretelling change
reversal and upheaval
wordlessly
to a pair
of plastic speculums, one
round mirror
two packets of pinks
and marigold seeds and a baggie
full of wish-
bones

the letters lie neatly
resisting disorderly influence
armored in clean
white envelopes, unsent,
unsure
if grief or rage or
just goodbye
is the message they
were meant for, these

Wonderbread
bleached and portion-
controlled
revelations, arranged
perfectly
in order of their
slicing
off

—Diana Harvestmoon





husk

walking
single-file
down a steep hill
tracing every
crevice in an old
stone wall,
my hand lay
open-palmed over
the clouded husk
of a scorpion, and
a hollow
stillness
possessed me
all that day
tucking the unstung
hand
tenderly under my
arm
remembering
the lightness
of death's touch

—Diana Harvestmoon



—Margaret McHugh

SCENES FROM A FOREIGN FILM

I am an old man, confined to a wheelchair. I haven't been able to use my legs . . .

since I started to become like the fish. I wheel down the corridor like a guppy in a bowl of water. They say my eyesight is going, I don't know, it is long since I have seen anyone. I stare out past my fish eye which sees nothing but the world moving away from me. I wheel down the corridor and everything moves away from me, towards the wall.

Occasionally, something moves towards me and probes. I think that I answer their questions but I do not know. They rearrange the world around me and seem satisfied.

I am amused by my fish eye. It looks out and does not show if it sees or does not see. No one can guess the thoughts behind an eye like that. There are no lines in my eye, no pattern. I do not know if I am alive. My eye does not bead, it does not go flat. My eye is and only is.

I care not to discern the shapes around me. At one time I may have been concerned with their forms, had been curious or amused, but now they are like a dream that is fading slow. The memory of this empty room may come back. The memory of this room will never have any meaning. The shape of this room is the shape of my death. The shape of my departure.

I swim around my bowl and see the old man in the bed. The old man is me. I see people come in and sit around the bed. They are talking, but I do not hear. As they leave, I sometimes see them trying to rearrange their lives in the mirror. They stand before the mirror, but the room behind them doesn't change. The lines in their eyes don't change, so nothing changes.

I am taken back to a previous world. The world before and after this one. The world which contains this room. I see my life that began before now, I see the world as it was created. I see a man standing before a mirror. He is a sick man and they are trying to heal him. They do not know if they are improving him or only changing him. They are in a position to try, so they do.

He stares and looks and stares and looks into the mirror until he becomes something he never was. Then he looks again into the mirror. With light they form in the mirror an image of the lines of his eyes. They gradually straighten the image of the lines in the mirror and the lines in his eyes adjust. It is a slow process, but it is the most that they know. It is the best they can do. The lines become so fine that they seem to disappear.

As time passes, as the days go by, the man's vision is restored. He is grateful to the men who restored his sight. He thanks them profusely and is perplexed by their reaction. They welcome him, but he knows that he is not really one of them. He is left to move through his new world with little understanding of his place in it.

The man looks up from his bed at the fish in the bowl. He thought the fish was looking back at him, but he sees that it is not. It is only swimming about the bowl. It is alone. The man thinks that he is now able to move about the room. He readjusts his clothes on the chair. Tiring, he stands and looks out the window. The sun is setting, a brilliant orange, the color of the goldfish. He

knows that the orange will disappear into the night. He knows that he must get out of the hospital. He wakes and remembers he is dreaming. He knows that his legs will no longer carry him to the window. He remembers that he can no longer move out of bed without getting help. He knows that he is the goldfish in the bowl. He must wait until they come to him. He must wait until they can see what he can see.

They gave the man a glass of water to drink. They held it for him as he drank. As he drank, he remembered. He remembered the story of the frog and the fish.

This is the story of the frog and the fish: Once upon a time there was a frog who lived quietly in the tall grass by a little pond. The frog lived a simple life. There was peace. There was plenty to eat. When night came, the frog found pleasure. In the day, the frog slept in the shade and sat in the sun.

Then, one day, while taking a drink of water from the pond, the frog saw something he had never seen before. He saw a fish. He saw the bright colors and he saw how silently the fish swam through the water. He thought that the fish was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. He wanted to become the fish. Every day the frog watched for the fish and when he saw it, its beauty astounded him.

The frog longed to talk with the fish and tell it of his admiration. But each time the frog neared the fish, the fish became frightened and swam away. Slowly, the frog learned to come to the fish, using his eyes and a grace before unknown. The frog learned to come to the fish while listening to the song of the birds. The birds longed to talk with the frog.

One day the frog saw men come to the pond and capture certain fish with a pole and a line of string. This saddened the frog. He was afraid they would capture his fish. So every time the men approached the pond and started fishing, the frog cried out a warning to the fish. He learned to make different sounds according to where the men were around the pond. He only hoped that the fish would understand his signals and stay safely away. The fish, attracted to the sounds of the frog, followed those sounds about the lake and lived—a beautiful fish, a long time.

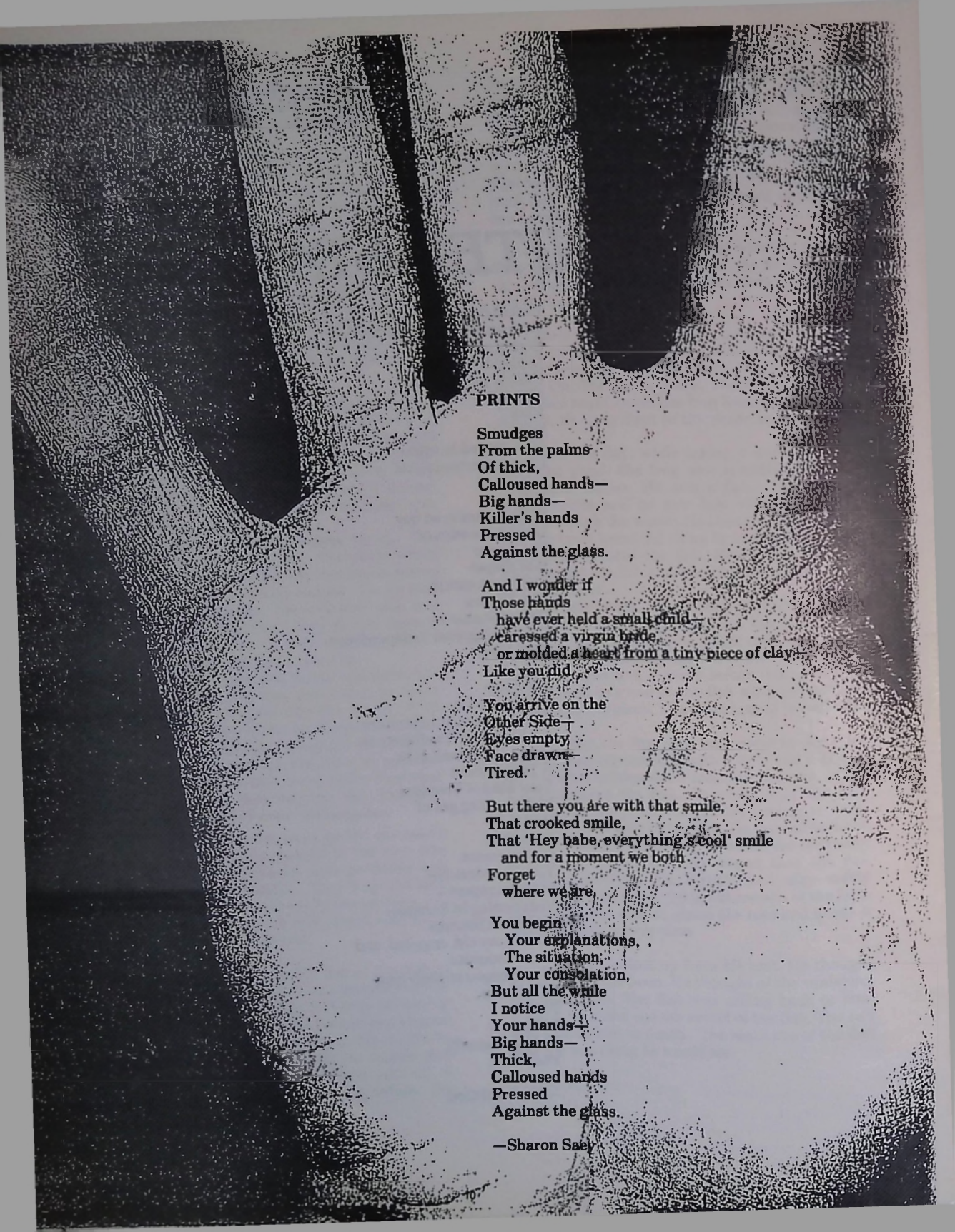
The man looked up from his rest. He thought of the fish in the bowl. He thought of the vanishing orange sunset. The fish was calling back to him. Finally, he could see the sound of the fish. The fish was calling him to death. The black eye of the fish was the last thing he would see.

—John Kilgore

UNITED STATES

United States?
Who are you to call yourself—
Such a name?
United States.
Calling your names—
Nigger
Kike
Spic
Men draped in white
Carrying crosses that
Cut
Kill
While a blue eyed boy
Lies on the edge of
The corner
Wet diaper
Chocolate mouth
Dirt fingers
United States—
Celebrating your Independence
With Fire,
Fury—
Fuck you
United States
Calling yourself Liberators
Pushing your Traditions on
Others who don't give
A Damn about
Your kind of Freedom
Your melting pot of
Pride,
Prejudice,
Prejudgment.
Your Freedom lies
In Skyscrapers—
Vacationing in Europe—
Suburban Sinners
While your old, crippled, and
Your innocents
Are strapped to their beds
Of Poverty,
Pain
Puke.
United States?
Fuck You.

—The Lord God



PRINTS

Smudges
From the palms
Of thick,
Calloused hands—
Big hands—
Killer's hands
Pressed
Against the glass.

And I wonder if
Those hands
 have ever held a small child—
 caressed a virgin bride,
 or molded a heart from a tiny piece of clay—
Like you did.

You arrive on the
Other Side—
Eyes empty,
Face drawn—
Tired.

But there you are with that smile,
That crooked smile,
That 'Hey babe, everything's cool' smile
 and for a moment we both
Forget
 where we are.

You begin
 Your explanations,
 The situation,
 Your consolation,
But all the while
I notice
Your hands—
Big hands—
Thick,
Calloused hands
Pressed
Against the glass.

—Sharon Saey

PLAYING THE PART

You peer at me from steely-blue eyes,
Red indignation burning from the end of your low-tar Camel.
You challenge me to amend my ways.
"Jesus was a Utopian communist," you throw at me,
"And you've tried to reduce his revolutionary message to being nice."
I look away from you,
Shifting my middle-aged weight from foot to foot.
I don't know how to turn human suffering or
The experience of faith into a political agenda.

The angry smoke circles around your face
As you wait for an answer that is not forthcoming.
I remember you at three, insisting
I play Cinderella to your Prince Charming,
Crying if I called you by name instead of "Prince."
We danced in the kitchen until the clock struck the dinner hour,
And the glass slipper broke along with the magic spell.
You sullenly parted with your construction paper crown,
Tearfully glaring at me.
Even then, I couldn't quite get the role right.

—Nancy Freeman

CAT and MOUSE

She was the Cat,
and she knew . . .

She was the Cat.
the Cat with the cat eyes,
the Cat with the cat moves . . .
She was the Cat.

Purring like a cat
and walking the cat walk
and talking the cat talk
on the catwalk . . .
She was the Cat.

the Cat with the feline eyes,
the Cat with the feline thighs . . .
She was the Cat.

I would have followed that Cat
anywhere,
because she was the Cat that I
wanted.
She was the Cat.

the lioness in winter
killing me for dinner
and carrying me to her den
in her cat-like jaws,
too scared and stiff
to give a shit
because she was the Cat that I wanted . . .
and she knew
what I wanted . . .
She was the Cat.



the perfect cat imitator
the Great Cat Emulator,
and I
her Tom cat ejaculator . . .
We went at each other
“like two cats over a clothesline”
as my grandpa would say,
slapping with cat paws
and scratching with cat claws.
but *she* was the Cat
and I was the one
who bled
and ended up dead
at the side of the road
like some old country toad
flattened by some cat in a red pickup truck.

but she was what I had wanted . . .
She was the Cat. . .

I saw a cat on a corner
down on Baker Street
banging a scratched up guitar,
and I asked him if he knew any Cat Stevens.
He didn't.
but I dropped some quarters
in his hat anyway,
and went across the street to Barney's
and ordered up a White Russian . . .
in a saucer.

“What, d'ya think yer a cat or somethin'?”
No.
but I had a cat once;
with cat eyes
and cat moves . . .
She was a Cat all right,
and she knew.

—Rob Holland



—Sally Black

A STUDY IN BLACK AND WHITE

He spent the first day brooding.

“What am I doing here?” were his first words—
followed closely by “What are *you* doing here?”

“I’m so glad you came,” Tatanya said. “I’ve been waiting for so long, and they told me you would be here, but I was beginning to wonder.”

He told her to shut up and retreated to a corner where he sat and said nothing, looking around the room. It was a large room. A collection of homemade posters vainly strove to cover the peeling green paint. These posters were simple white sheets with black lettering, saying things like

REVOLUTION and POWER TO THE PEOPLE—in Russian and English. The furniture in the room was mismatched and obviously secondhand. There stood a wooden table, a desk, several chairs, and an army cot in one corner. On the table, the centerpiece of the room, sat a small printing press. Several stacks of paper lay around it, some with and some awaiting their printed messages. After silently surveying the room for hours, he fell asleep.

"I thought it might go away," he said when he came to. Tatanya, curled on the cot, looked over her shoulder at him as he began beating on the walls. "I really don't understand this!" his voice edged with anger. "Why do I hallucinate?"

Tatanya stood, stretching and yawning. "It's no hallucination, Leo. I've been here for years."

"No," he said quietly, almost to himself. "It is an hallucination. You're just a part of it. It will end soon." And he sank into a nearby chair.

Tatanya walked over to the table and sat down. She had a pretty face, but her hair was pulled severely back and knotted into a tight bun. She wore a simple black peasant dress and black stockings. A pair of black leather shoes underneath the cot were hers as well. Most curious about her appearance, however, were the red markings on her throat. As if someone had tried to choke her, or something had been tied tightly around her neck.

"Will you talk with me?" she asked Leon, now slumping in his chair in the corner. "I've been here alone for so long, it would be nice to talk with someone."

He sat still for awhile, then looked directly at Tatanya for the first time since he'd been in the room. His usually intense eyes looked tired behind their wire-rimmed glasses. "Explain it to me," he said. "Explain to me why I'm dreaming this. Why not something else? Why am I not just dead and gone?"

"I don't know. I've been waiting here. A strange man told me a long time ago, that if I waited here, you would show up. And here you are. You look . . . different. Older."

"And you waited for me? Why didn't you leave?"

Tatanya nodded over to where a door had once been. Now there stood only solid wall. "I couldn't."

"Wait a minute. How did we get in here?"

Tatanya shrugged. "I don't understand it either." She paused, and looked pointedly at Leon. "There were always many things I didn't understand."

He turned away quickly, rising from his chair and walking across the room. "This is all some kind of cruel joke," he sighed. "This isn't where I should be."

"Then where *should* you be?"

"I don't know. Moving people, working

towards . . . well, working towards the cause."

"The cause?"

"Yes, working for the people. Bringing on the Zussamenbrüch that will lead to a socialist state. Paving the way to a perfect communistic world."

"Words, Leo. Words. They were all words. Always your Marx and your Engels. You never had time for anything else."

Leon leaned against the wall, still facing away from Tatanya. "There was never time for anything else. If you wanted to get anything done, you had to devote yourself to the cause—soul, mind, and body. You believed in the revolution. You should know. You were a Party member."

"It never meant anything to me. All the rallies and the working hard—I was working for you. Not the Party. And shouting the slogans. The shouting was what mattered, really, not the words. I could put my feelings into the shouting. The words were just there."

"No, the words were everything. It was the words that brought about the action—the change—the revolution." Leon looked over his shoulder. "You don't know what happened, do you?"

Tatanya shook her head, so Leon came over to the table and sat across from her. "I was allowed to return to the Motherland. I organized the people, and brought about the most glorious revolution. After that, the people began working together, uniting themselves to bring about a time of great peace . . . Brothers working together for the good of the state—beautiful, beautiful Russia."

"Is that what happened, Leo?"

He had picked up one of the printed leaflets from the table and was looking at it. "No. You want the truth?" His eyes flickered up from the leaflet to her face, then back again. "It just wasn't working out like I thought. In the end, they didn't even want my help . . . didn't want me . . ." His voice trailed off. He walked over to the cot, his footsteps heavy on the bare, wooden floor. As he lay down, he said, "I've talked enough."

"What do you do here?" he asked, later.

"Think, mostly. It's about all there is. I'm bored a lot, too. Sometimes, I just sit here and the time passes and I'm not even aware. Of course, I'm never sure just how much time passes. Quite a bit, I'd guess."

Leon walked over to her while she was talking. She loosened her hair bun, letting the strands fall about her face and shoulders. He ran his hands through the hair, making it fuller. "You are a pretty woman," he said.

Tatanya sat frantically still, hands in her lap, looking up at Leon. "You never noticed before?"

"It really was my fault." He let his hands fall to Tatanya's shoulders, then slowly moved them up and caressed her neck. "I thought about you a lot. It used to make me so angry. But I couldn't

stop myself. I was so glad when I finally got to leave New York. It was New York—home of the capitalists. It was New York—wallowing in its filthy stagnation, unwilling to change. And it was New York—*home* of Tatanya."

Tatanya blinked to squelch the brimming tears. "You shouldn't blame yourself, Leo. It was me. It was me all the time. I didn't know how to control my—my feelings, my emotions."

Leon cradled her face in his hands, gently brushing the tears from the corners of her eyes with the tips of his thumbs. "I'm sorry. Sorry that I never took the time to notice you. But you've got to try and understand . . . I didn't, because . . . because I didn't think I could . . ."

"Kiss me."

"Now?"

"Yes now. Kiss me. I've waited."

Leon knelt in front of her, pulling her face close. He kissed her tentatively at first. She put her hands on his shoulders, sliding out of the chair that clattered unheard to the floor. Suddenly, they were rolling, devouring. Tatanya gripped Leon's shirt, pulling it out of his pants, unbuttoning it. Leon ran his hands feverishly over her dress, before he yelled, "This thing has no buttons!"

Tatanya laughed and rolled Leon onto his back. "It comes off in one piece," she said. Straddling him, she raised herself and pulled her dress up. She shook her head, fluffing out her hair again, as the dress came completely off. She smiled at Leon and reached to untie her chemise.

"No," Leon said, raising himself on his elbows. He tried to pull himself away. "No . . . get up."

"What is it?"

"Get up," Leon said urgently, almost knocking Tatanya over as he pulled away. She caught herself with one hand, then stood. Leon half-ran, half-crawled to the cot, climbing into it and facing the wall.

Tatanya walked over to him, sitting on the edge of the cot. She ran her hand along his arm. "What's wrong?"

"I can't do this. I can't go through with it."

"Why not?"

"I've never done this before."

"That's okay." Tatanya leaned over and kissed him softly on the cheek, then nuzzled his ear. "Neither have I. But I want to. I dreamed it would be like this. Discovering—"

He shook his head, shoving her away from him. "NO! No, I can't. Go! Go on. Put your dress back over your head. This . . . this was all a mistake. I don't know what came over me."

"Leo. You don't understand. I love you. I have always loved you."

"No. No, you don't. Love—it's just a word. No, don't. Just go—put your dress on. I want to be alone."

Tatanya left him, going, as he commanded, to the middle of the room, where her dress was.

Without saying a word, she picked it up and put it on.

Leon lay on the cot, staring at the wall. A thousand thoughts were racing through his head, but none of them stayed, none of them focused. Never before had he felt such unrestrained emotion. It frightened him. And when he turned and saw Tatanya again, he knew he would feel the same way. It was like spinning around in a circle, faster and faster, growing more and more dizzy, but not wanting to stop.

"Tatanya, you were right," he said quietly, then paused. But there was no answer. "Tatanya? You were right. Love isn't just a word. It's more. It's—I don't know. Come back over here, okay? I want to hold you. For a little while. Tatanya?" Leon rolled over and looked around the room.

She was not there.

"Tatanya," he said, with desperation. He stood and ran around the room, looking under everything—knocking it all to the ground. "NO!" he screamed as he heaved the table onto its side.

The printing press crashed to the floor.

"No! Tatanya! Where are you?" He ran over to the wall where the door had been and began pounding on it. "Where are you? How did you leave? Come back! I want you here!" His fist tore a poster on the wall—a large one urging WORKERS UNITE! He savagely tore the poster—only to discover another beneath it. WORKERS UNITE!

"No . . ." Leon's voice quavered. He ran to the other side of the room, tearing another poster. And beneath it—one identical.

Leon ran around and around the room like a possessed man, tearing every poster and banner from the wall. Then, when he had finished, he started over. In fact, it seemed that with every trip around the room there were more posters to torment him.

Soon, the room was a sea of torn white paper, fabric, and posterboard. All of it adorned with the black words of Leon's revolution. His fingers were starting to bleed from their toil. Before long, they were in such bad condition that they couldn't grab a poster firmly enough to tear it completely from the wall.

He wandered around the room in a daze. He shook his head in disbelief as he looked at the study in black and white that surrounded him. This was his work—his life.

He sank slowly to the floor, buried his face in his bloody hands, and began to cry.

—Norman Welch

Ice Maiden

I paused in the doorway.
 "Come in," she said,
 and waved me through.
The walls were pale and bare,
the windows shuttered and veiled.
 I stood uneasily in
 the pristine shadows.
Then I saw the rabbits,
huge white, green, and pink,
 behind her,
 on the bed.
I reached towards them,
one hand stretched out in delight.
 "Jimmy gave them to me,"
 she said, and I froze—
saw the hidden mine explode,
the flag over the sealed coffin.
 "I'll cover them someday
 in plastic," she said, and brushed
an imaginary speck of dust
from one lifeless ear.

—Julie Koeneman



—Ernest Abel

VETERAN

I was there in sweating jungles
and I believed.
I believed in right and wrong
in God almighty.
They came for me one night;
I had to.
I had to fire pointblank into their faces.
When I asked the priest to absolve me
he said that there was no need.
No need.
And he believed.

—Julie Koeneman

LAKE WINNEBAGO

I saw myself
sink to the bottom
of your martini—
ripe olive skewered
on miniature trident.
Your tongue
darted at me
sip after sip—
your throat
wanted to
swallow me whole.
It was surprising
to watch
myself, drowning
so passively
when I had sworn
never again
to dance so freely
on the rim.

I was only
seven when
it happened
first.
My Medusa hair
swirled
about my head;
lake water
turned the sky
a crystal green.
I struggled for
my raft,
a cube in your drink;
a hand
fished me
out by my hair.

The hand
is gone now,
the light touch
leaving hollow prints
on the sweating glass.
I am inside,
drowning;
you are outside,
touching the surface
of another drink.

—Catherine Vale



—Sally Black

THAT BLACK LOOK

I followed your car
yesterday,
turned on my high beams,
and drove through all
the red lights.
You took the
dark path,
and I looked down,
down
at you
through my black veil
of tears.

I was born
weeping,
that black look
on my face.
I knew that look
could kill.
My smile, a web
entangling live prey;
your body
pulsated, throbbed,
as I strangled
with sleek, black
lace.
I was always a widow
by name.

I am the universal
mourner, the high priestess
of death.
There I am,
in soot-covered rags—
the trappings
of my pageantry—
and black tatters
whirl about
my face.
A hungry crow,
I peck the last
breath
from the crushed entrails
of the squirrel
you hit
on your way
down.

—Catherine Vale

SLAKE CHARMER

It sits, waiting,
inside a wicker
basket,
tongue darting
in hypnotic rhythm,
eyes glazed,
lids drooping,
but it never
ever
sleeps.

I am to raise
this creature,
this beast.
Veiled in silk,
belly exposed,
a flute
at my trembling
lips,
I send
an eerie tune
echoing
to the basket.
It sits
bloated,
pregnant,
almost breathing,
as the thing
begins to writhe
inside.

But I never
asked
to be
a mystic flutist;
I did not want
to be
a holy resurrector.
Now I play on,
driven by my own
faltering song,
and the creature
looms above me,
coiled,
hissing.
It is
ready
to strike.

—Catherine Vale

Recipe for the Totally Powerless Woman

An essential ingredient for this recipe is total dependency. Without this main ingredient, this recipe will most certainly fail. Be dependent on your husband financially, dependent on your church spiritually, dependent on your children maternally—dependent on all three emotionally. Any inner strengths or resources are strictly forbidden. This concoction requires years of gradual grating away of any hint of self-confidence. Soon, you will forget that it has been left out.

Next, always but always look to others for positive feedback about yourself. For surely, their opinion of you is far more important and flattering than any you could possibly have. Say and do exactly what is expected of you. If, by any chance, you are not quite sure what that is—just look around at the majority, see what the norm is, and follow suit, no matter how bizarre the actions may seem. Any deviation from this conformity might qualify you as being different, leading to an improper blending of the ingredients.

Now, fill yourself with as much guilt as you can possibly hold. Feel guilty about everything—from the starving child in Africa who has nothing to the spoiled child in your own home who has everything—from the ring around the toilet bowl to the ring around your husband's collar. Feel guilty about being happy with your lot in life. Feel guilty about being unhappy with your lot in life. And, if you must, feel guilty about feeling guilty. This part of the preparation is almost as important as the main ingredient. Think of all the things guilt has kept you from doing in the past and will keep you from doing in the future. With just a little practice you should perfect this technique.

You are now ready for several heaping portions of fear. This element will add just the dulling effect needed to keep said contents from becoming too spicy—from flowing over into more exciting areas. Here are some helpful hints:

1. Don't try new things for fear of failing.
2. Don't deviate from the norm for fear of being different.
3. Don't tell the truth to someone who needs to know it for fear of hurting them.
4. Don't attempt new friendships for fear of being rejected.
5. Don't appear too aggressive for fear of being un-lady-like.
6. Don't voice your opinion for fear of being criticized.
7. DO fear that nothing in your life will ever change.

Now that you have mastered the above steps, suffer the demanding preparation of this recipe in silence. This will give rise to a steady and consistent sense of martyrdom and resentment, resulting in a kind of pinched, clenched outer coating.

Finally, the outward appearance of this product must always be picture-perfect to those viewing it, lest they detect the destruction within. Strict dieting, expensive make-up and hairstyles, strenuous exercise, and maybe a little plastic surgery will accomplish this amazing feat—but, after all, isn't it worth it?

P.S.—This recipe serves doubly well as a side-dish for alcoholism, pill addiction, and everyday nervous breakdowns.

—Cynthia A. Bowen

LOST / BRAIN-DEAD

part I

Lost
Brain-dead
Slimy maggots squirm
through my secrets

Privacy
A burden
Step lightly or
crush my fragile mind

A torrid memory
consumes my skull
Hot, burning, tingling in my ear
Trickling down my neck

Sensations never cease
There is no numb
The hurt never stops
There is no escape

I hear my own heartbeat
throbbing in my head
Blood pulsing through my chest
Why can't I speak

Frustrations build to bizarre
ecstasy
Joy. I'm finally exploding!
A child screams
"Mommy, let me sleep!"

—Theresa G. Masters

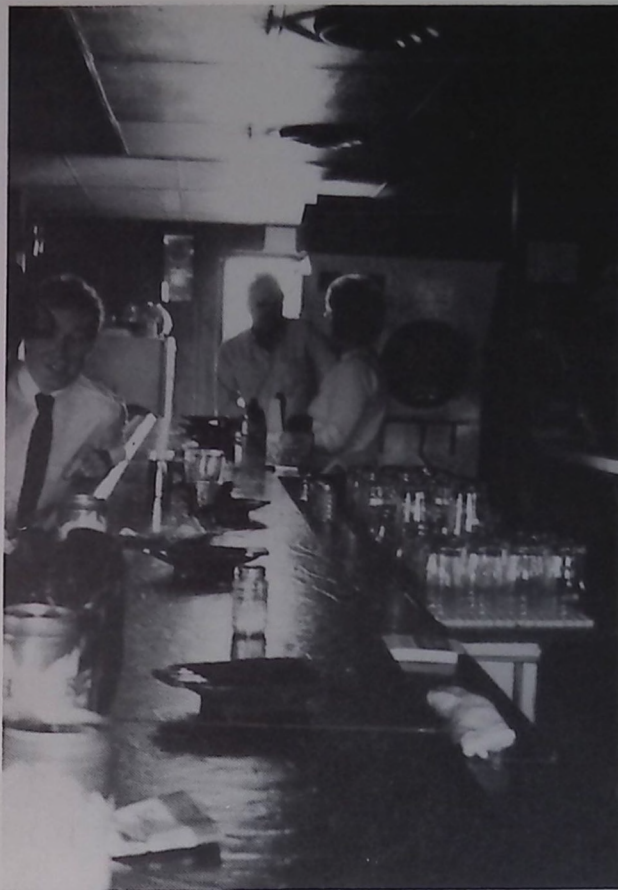
part II

Lost
Brain-dead
Searching through the
Shadows that hide
Like a viper's tongue.
It smells the heat of man.

Blank faces pressed against
Blank screens.
Swirling bands of black
Stretch across the blood-red sky.
The sky descends upon them,
But they don't look.
Their fear forces their chins
To their chests.

There used to be light.
Once, long ago,
Their eyes glistened
With a hunger for knowledge.
Nature held back in abeyance.
But the worm of knowledge
Sweetly and sinisterly
Bore into their minds
And left them with only
Unconscious conscience.
God blinked.
Nightmarish awakening,
A child screams
"Mommy, let me sleep!"

—Robert Doyle



—Sharon Saey

You And Me And All Of Us Always

Early on, the world made it quite clear how much it hated me.

And I hated it back. I hated everything. I hated my body, my scrawniness, my too long neck and semi-blindness. And I hated the flu and sickness and being wrapped in blankets while my mother doted over me and I hated her for doting and I hated her for not hating me—hated my father for his strong passivity—his reserved strength and his inability to hate—I hated people with big, expressive eyes—eyes big and artificial and lying to me and hiding from me things they hated. And I hated my grandparents for being old and for falling down and breaking brittle bones. I hated noses and faces, and judgmental mouths. I grew to hate alcohol: hate it and drink it deep. Hate tobacco and smoke it even deeper. Hate loudness and too much laughter and smugness—hate the sound of blowing my nose, the smell of my own shit, the blotches bleeding and oozing on my face—hate everyone and anything and all of it and then—I wrote it down. And I hated it more—and the more I wrote the more I hated writing, and the more I HAD to write—self-destructive tendencies, cannibalism of my own fucking soul—and I hated the characters I created and my best characters were the ones most hateful. If I hated them, they were real. If I hated them, they lived. Hated them. Hated it. Hated and hate and will hate you and me and all of us always.

Early on, the world made it quite clear.

—Judas Cain

Dení, Dídí, Dící



—Sally Black