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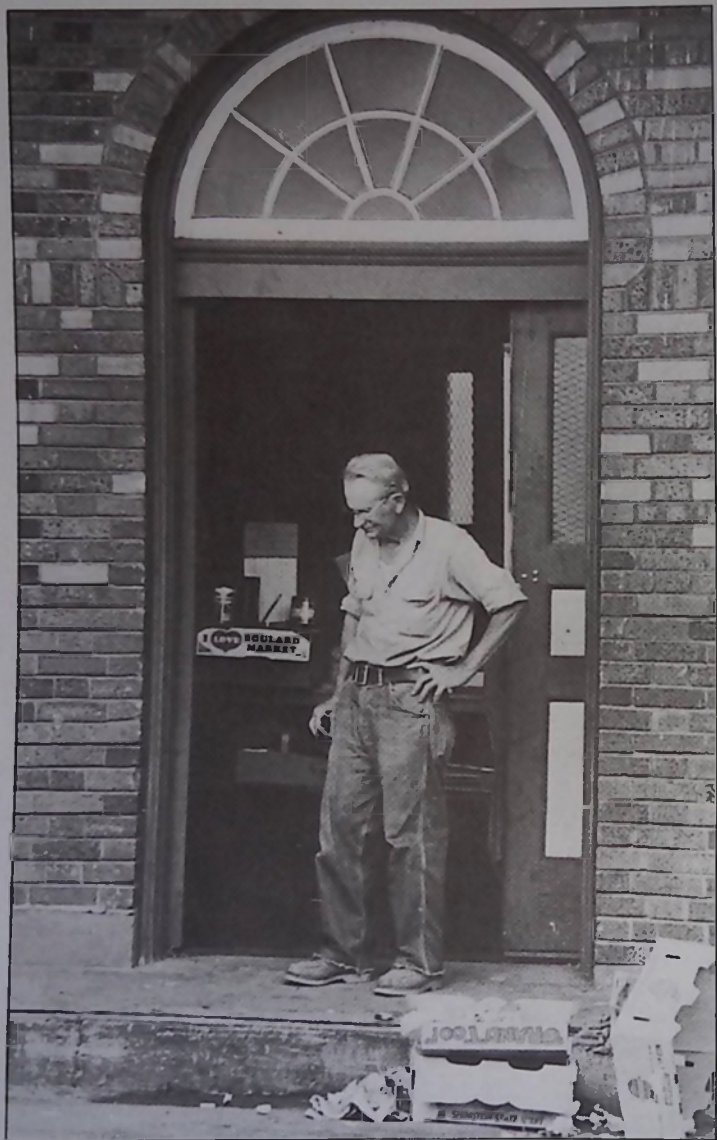
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The 1989/1990

Literary Magazine

**University of Missouri
St. Louis**



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Part I



MICHAEL FINNEGAN

First, the washing of the hands
a crossing of self, more washing, begin again,
scraping clean the sin
of killing thoughts screaming to set me
free
tearing at the cytosine and thymine
of father and mother
in the scrubbing
one,two,three, need nine
to make up to god
the bones I didn't count
brushing
head in the basin
washing
the wind came up and
crossing
blew them in again
washing

SHAMAN

Ke-ya-na-wa-ni wa-na
whine of squaw in keening night
always softly, lowly wailing

Ke-na to-he no-to-wa
calls the wind inside my doorway
whispers the voice of mother calling
come and see me in my darkness

I am in the trees
come
see me
I am
the earth
sleep
within me
and be
free

SUMMER'S DANCE

winter comes fat
rubbing its daddy-walrus hide
against my warm

walrus cloud-breath
makes dark
banging into itself on me

flopping hoarfrost, it beaches itself

1929 NAOMI

I grew up, but hungry for dime-store hamburgers
and twenty-two inch, razor-sharp trouser cuffs
and the dimes you cadged from dad while I wore
two-sizes-too-small shoes

the only girl in a brothers' seraglio, I slept on
the quilts that clashed with your cuffs, and scrubbed
our floors for a penny-promise to see Fred Astaire

and I watched from my one-woman ballroom

as they found you among the furniture,
amid the chaos and confusion of the triple homicide,
your twenty-two inch, razor sharps as dulled as your
dead eyes.

I rose from the floor at sixty-five.

SATURDAY NIGHT

Auditory crack,
television,
blowing its earmoke into your mind
nonstop drugtillyour
eyes-go-glass
can fill a woman,
herself no more than
voices ringing off
white walls

Sam's Piano

And he knew benches,
And fire,
And the way John Wayne handled women,
And horses,
And cursing,
In the open places,
Without admonishment.

Few times he walked
On Cobblestone
Before it was cobblestone,
On granite,
In the mine,
And was happy.

And it went with him,
Always,
The love he had,
For shoes.

Seminole fathers taught him,
Every direction turns westward.
But he knew,
Atrocities occurred
To the east
And to the south.

He never lived
Except in his mind.
He couldn't read the signs;
They were
In English.

But he knew,
Presidents and Big Bird,
And the number 9,
And the letter T.
But he could never remember,
What Napoleon had said,
Or Caesar, or
Jesus.

But Charleton Heston,
Parted the waters,
And he was there.

And then he died.

And Charleton Heston
Still parted the waters,
Twice yearly.
But nothing had changed,
Except for the color
Of Sam's Piano

The Waitress

Her honest smile charms and disarms you,
A stranger you've known forever, taking
Your order with sincerity and bustling off
With your happiness in her pocket.

She has no hips and her chest is flat,
So people smile at her young ambition.
Gently you tell her your hamburger is cold,
Your milk is warm, and you asked for pickles.

She takes your plate with the weight of her patience
Turning her knuckles white, her dimples red,
Her eyes fall into real lines,
Not the temporary folds of good humor
You mistook them for.

When she returns with your order,
The glow of youth is flaking off.
Her complexion cracks when she smiles.
The smile you thought was innocent,
Was only brave.

Night Songs

On stranger tides
Come those
With wailing catcalls
And open arms
To spirit away
The sleeping man
From those he loves.

Catacombs

I

Please
Take me away from this place
You know, you came
From the lowlands
From the nether-regions
From the catacombs
Can we go back there?
Can we exist once more
In the static?
In the sheltered morning
The sun does not rise
Set the seal shut
Roll forward the stone
Close the crypt
Cradle a life
To sleep

II

You are ill conceived here
You rise, you rise
Phoenix-like
A latter day Lazarus
Enstoned
Subdued and yet with a certain strength
Shaking off the brittleness
The fluid breath
Slows and
Sets in the chest
And the limbs wonder awake
And the weathered world
Becomes possibly open
Your eyes, your eyes
Set endentured

Encaved in spirit
But awakening
Into a resurgence
Becoming dynamic and exact
An elegant emergence
Receding through the coals
Through the encrypted life
Into the engraving light

III

And now the living rise to meet the dead
Now the catacombs are opened and emptied
The scripted mummys crumble to life
To find a welcome complacent setting
For this world filled with darkening passages
Spots where the sun will not play
These are homes to us all at twilight
Desperate shelters musted and stained
These are courtly pertinent dwellings
Where our ancestral lifelines are stored
These birthful scripts for a germinal memory
These seedlings resurrected from the plotted
earth

INSIDE SILVER GLASS

She sits down to her dressing table,
Preparing for another day --
Of charades.
Looking into the mirror,
Darkened circles and hallowed cheeks —
Stare back.
Slowly, she begins choosing
Different colors and brushes,
Applying them to create a reflection,
Of her once, natural appearance.
Combing the limp, black strands
With one hand,
She twists them with the other,
And pins the knot at her crown.
She smiles at her new portrait,
And whispers dreams of happiness
Along with hopes
For a good game today.
She stands and turns towards the door,
Leaving her identity
Deep within the silver glass.

Listen

The world is quiet
When velvet fog
Descends upon us,
Dampening shadows of brick
And the tallest trees,
And strangers feed each other
Kind words, like soft leaves,
To keep themselves warm.
The smell of old evergreens
Leads us downhill.
We drink in
The soft crayon night
Until only the sound
Of bare feet on wet grass
Remains.
Here I think I might
Love you
If you keep
Still.

Undertow

Picture yourself
A thousand tiny pebbles rushing downstream

In the current that presses your skin
Against huge, jagged rocks
As frightening
As you are frightened

Remember that the undertow
Can take you in
So easy
Then imagine that I
Am the silt,
Thick and coarse and not nearly
As lovely as the waterfall

Think how I can bury you
In my cool, muddy layers
Beneath all that brings you pain

Imagine how tenderly
I can fold my flesh
Around you.

Poets' Love Song

Amidst the early morning lovers
Beneath a newborn sun
We sat on park benches
In the dark
We, whose dormant hearts
Suffered the cold
Surviving on tired manuscripts
And dog-eared love letters,
We saw it coming.

We used to wait for it
In cozy cafes,
And prophesize with our pens
On paper napkins,
Color it with chalk
On city sidewalks.

We argued it in the classroom,
With our heroes in black and white,
Wanting to be the new heroes.

We took it to our cars,
Drove the idea
To the edge of town
And watched it
Walk across the water.

We carried the song
Until our voices cracked,
Carried it
To the precipice of our hunger,
Then gave it away,
But kept what we wanted.

It was everybody's idea
Whispering across blue fields
Dancing down dark alleys.
The old ladies danced it too,
Realizing they hadn't forgotten
The rhythm.

We all wanted
To join hands and take it home,
But it wasn't ours to keep
So we kissed love goodbye
And let it go,
And sat,
Singing it to the sky,
On our park benches
In the dark.

On The Importance of Sound (Section 3: Chimes and Bells)

- i. The voice is not a voice at all . . .
but rather the rise and fall of clear tones,
and rumbling coffee-brown bass
from behind the wall.
No words survive the trip. Just
the music of human thoughts,
given form.
- ii. The church bells awaken me
on Sunday morning (afternoon!)
from my secular sleep.
My aimless thoughts
race my sight out the window,
to slide easily up the brilliant tones,
hit the tower, and scatter, crystalline
into the sky beyond.
- iii. There is a bronze bell on my desk,
from a Japanese shrine, I was told.
It prangs when I strike it.
The note hangs in the air,
growing, surrounding me, suggesting gently that
it will never end. Then
it fades, its bid for immortality
denied.
And the air mourns its memory.

Fishermen

Knee deep
in a sparkling ribbon of blue-green
they stand,
side by side,
but beautiful worlds apart,

waving graphite wands
in delicate arcs,

glancing with eyes of child-like indifference
at neighbors
who reel in trout.

WALNUT WAY

Steel driven into dirt
As the fathers squat
To hammer in swing sets.
Nails stab into their palms,
Nails that don't fit
All the way.
And daughters
With dandelion seeds
Cupped in their hands,
Imagine sharp rust
Raking their thigh.

On shadowed sundecks
Aluminum furniture reclines
With diaphragms tossed
Beneath plastic cushions
While respective couples sweat
Washing the sidewalk.
Torsos of men
Like waltzing trunks
Tangle with violence and passion.
And a football
Is what they carry
Between two hands
Under an American bought blue sky.

MY GRANDPA WAS A COWBOY

He was already thin when his first wife died.
She had heartbreak deep in her bones;
He had no other connection,
Falling past volumes of leather-bound
histories,
Down the rabbit-hole.

He liked my wife,
He liked little carved whiskey bottles
Labeled drink me.
At times, he would bloat with dignity
And then shrivel in shame.

He built me a dusty house
And I could see his body spilling out --
Head up the chimney,
Arms shooting out windows,
Legs unfolding from doors,
His bolo-tie down the dirt path.

He fixed tiny thirsty trees
And gigantic pin-wheels.
He talked to a huge blue rattlesnake
Who sat on a Yucca and smoked a Bull
Durham.
He rubbed it's bloody poison with rotten
dreams
To give his picture a tint of green.

He had no reputation for solidation,
But his second wife he treated well.
He gave her a smiling tomcat,
A stucco ceiling,
A trap for doormice,
And a timepiece he stole from an April
Jackrabbit.

His second wife was a western belle.
She served tea to ranchers going mad
Inside their suede hats.
She had a calling for croquet
And a poker table
With dancing cards
That would paint her sun dried roses red.

In the end, the Jackrabbit's timepiece busted
Under the hoof
Of a stunned palomino.
Time was gone
And the mock angus cried.

JUST LOST

Gray hovers around this place
huddled by the chill
we gather around a metal hearth
flames bounce gold and blue
but leave us unsatisfied.

The cold winter's day
collapses around mason walls
it is the blue time
somewhere between
too soon, too late
and another day lost.

Another grain falls from heaven
a kernel of life
That has gone upland
it lands upon the pavement
barren, without hope of reincarnation.

Blue fingerprints press upon glass
invisible barriers stand
they hold cold noses and bruised dreams at bay
night falls upon the fire
somewhere in the night
we huddle between the blue and the gray.

My Song

they said i came to play
grind it out
work real hard
slide with your spikes high.

i read their minds
and listened to songs
and believed with my heart.

my blood surges
running at the speed of light
crossing eternal highways
bouncing off corners, chasing the demon.

each day a new journey
each moment a fight
i live for the smell of blood
mostly mine.

i wish i could be passive
live a poets' life.
suffer deep wounds
and bleed onto the page.

my body shakes
with volcanic eruptions
my intentions explode
and splatter molten resentment.
it never cools into porous rock.

each day a new journey
each moment a fight
i live for the blood
and slide with my cleats high.

60 Watt Romance

In a dull lighted room
on a hasty night
what we planned at the bar
did not turn out right

A play without passion
for a reason not real
stole the potential from
a touch
a word
a wonderful feel

when the useless bulb burns open our eyes
at dawn
we will awake remember and hurriedly
move on
losing the chance to reminisce with a sigh
and think of a soft midnight
when our hearts
and emotion
ran high

The Fat Man is Dead

The nicely dressed young man walks through the double glass doors into the glass building. His tall, muscular body moves calmly towards the elevator. His dark hair is pulled back into a ponytail. Not just any ponytail. The kind you see in GQ magazines.

He is dressed in his Italian wear. Suit by Brioni, shirt by Ferragamo, shoes by Gucci.

What style! What poise! What a character!

The elevator is slow in reaching the twenty-third floor, but he is expressionless.

I'll let you in on a little secret. He wasn't in his own bed last night and he probably won't be in his own bed tonight. Somewhat of a lady's man he is. The women love his twenty-seven year old body and his handsome face. They love his smooth pick-up lines. They love his charm and quick wit. But mainly they love him because he is the strong, quiet type of man. He usually picks up a lady every night. That is unless he is tired.

Seduction, romance, passionate sex! That's what you want to hear about. What a story!

But never mind that. There is work to be done. Just do it.

The Fat man in the business suit is sitting at his desk.

All of that paperwork.

His name is Charles Hendly, but I'll just call him the Fat man.

That's the way you would like it: the Fat man. He has been insecure about his weight ever since he can remember.

The Fat man is an accountant in a big import/export company. He is smart. Bossman, who owns the company, knew that, so he made the Fat man his own personal accountant.

It's 10:32 p. m. The Fat man is working hard. He always stays late, works hard. What for?

The Fat man always works hard. Look at him! Sweat dripping from his forehead. He is pulling out his brown, curly hair. He is under a lot of stress. He is only forty-four years old and he looks like he's seventy. He

thinks Bossman might be on to him. He hopes not! Double-cross the Bossman once and you are dead. D-E-A-D, dead!

Why risk it, Fat man? Why embezzle laundered drug-money from the meanest, most notorious, son-of-a-bitch, Cuban immigrant gangster in the greater Miami area?

For his wife, that's why.
He'll never know.

Let's see! What is the average attention span of the American reader? Five minutes or so? Maybe I should throw in a dirty word to keep your attention.

Sharon Hendly is a BITCH!

Sharon Hendly, the old ball and chain, the permanent piece at home. Call her what you want. The Fat man loves her. And she loves him, or at least that is what he thinks.

Oh, how wrong he is about her!

Let me tell you about the tramp:

She is slim and beautiful.

She is seductive and voluptuous.

She is manipulative and cunning.

She must dine at the finest restaurants, shop at the most expensive stores, drive no less than a Mercedes, and have at least four boyfriends. She married Hendly, twenty years her senior, for his money. The money he no longer has because of her daily spending binges.

But she has the Fat man wrapped around her finger.

And she cheats on him while he is at work, working hard for her.

SEX sells!

Shall I give you the details? Forget it! Use your imagination.

By the way, Bossman is one of her boyfriends.

He'll never know.

What a story! What a Story!

That reminds me of a joke:

Question: What are a woman's favorite four animals?

Answer: A mink in the closet, a tiger in bed,
a jaguar in the garage, and a jackass to pay
the bills.

Back to the story.

The elevator reaches the twenty-third floor. The office is empty and dark.

The nicely dressed man keeps walking towards the Fat man's door. Suite 2301.

Bossman set up the Fat man in this office building about ten years ago. That's when he realized the Fat man's talent for numbers. The Fat man was a nobody working in the accounts department. Bossman made him rich. The Fat man was loyal, too. If there is anything a gangster needs it is loyalty.

The reward for his loyalty: Suite 2301. A luxurious office overlooking the downtown area.

Why did he double-cross the Bossman, the meanest, most notorious, son-of-a-bitch, Cuban immigrant ganster in the greater Miami area?

For his wife, that's why.
He'll never know.

Suite 2301. There it is! The young man walks toward it. Kicks open the door.

He stands in the doorway of the dimly lit room. The Fat man looks up. Their eyes meet, but only for a second.

It's time. Pull out the gun!

The Fat man knows his life is over. Just a matter of time.

Aim for the bastard's head.

What the Fat man doesn't know about his wife, he'll go to his grave never knowing.

Pull the trigger.

He'll never know that she was his downfall.

BANG!!

One bullet pierces the Fat man's skull. One bullet. You did it!

The blood is all over the paperwork.

Violence, death, blood, murder! That is what you crave. That is what you demand. You are the reader and you expect no less.

BANG!! The Fat man is dead!

Part II



CounterClockWise

There is a whorl pattern
on my head - my hair is so short
that it follows the whorl
round and round
counterclockwise
naturally and easily, doing
only what it wants to do.
Funny
how in all my childhood pictures
whenever my hair was parted,
or I parted it, to a side,
it was parted
always
so as to make the whorl
go completely backwards.
As if I
and the whole world
were engaged in a twilight zone effort
to make me become
everything I was not.
And indeed
we were.

My Father's Ears

As an old man,
long after my father will have been dead,
what I will remember most --
more than his ferocious voice
booming down upon me,
more than the musky smell of shoe leather,
more than the crack
of a flat hand
against bare cheeks --
will be my father's ears
flaming
like match-heads
igniting terror.

Moving

Alone
in a warm rain,
floating,
waiting,
to be delivered:
drift
to dry land, then
stand,
reach up.

Across a wide plain
an orange moon
in a cold sky
sweeps
over the earth.

We are only moving
forward
to the fallow field,
always closer,
washing
in a flood of dark waves
through a crevice
and into the earth
down deep.

Bingo Every Tuesday

Bingo every Tuesday
gets her out of bed
to walk the halls
harshly lit and
stagnant with the stench
of old age and death
and minds slowly rotting
from not being used.

She doesn't like it there.
Sometimes she cries,
sometimes she speaks
of going back to her apartment.
But she never will,
we know it -- and so does she.
We pretend it's for the best.
She pretends she's living
because she has no other choice.

Ink Stains

My grandpa was a bitter man
5 foot 2 and

cheated

(over the presses
he breathed hot oily clouds of ink
day in day out)

He drank himself into a stroke and two heart attacks
and died a bitter man

Where there should be a smile on my face
you'll see a dark scowl

5 foot 4 and
you'd think the black clouds of ink
would have thinned in 40 years

Industrial Avenue

Must be a thousand
Pot-holed dreams like
This concrete one
Of automobile stores
Greasy teen-age food stops
And tattoo shops

Dotted in between
Are great big stones
Of Zion and Mason cemeteries
And the flimsy jacket
Of a man with his hands jammed down deep
And the wind slaps his road-mapped face
Joined by Miss Forlorn to mostly no place

At all in a long history
Of the little business
And two-year dreams
Must be a thousand like this
It seems

Romance Part I and/or Lust

"Your skin is my sin."
Like a cat springing from the window sill
Crouching on your chest to see into your eyes
Intimidating?
Bold?
Childish?
No, that's not IT!
"Your skin is my sin."
A glance to behold
Your demons are my children
Your sweetness exhilarating as wind slapping the wicked rain in my face
As I stand facing it nude
1,000 horses snort and trample in my blood
Out of control
A fish fighting on the hook.

Tornado Woman

One day Tornado Woman came down from the sky
to dance on the buffalo grounds.
She came down naked, gleaming white
in the light of a dying sun.
She had a basket of rain on one hip.
She had a basket of hail on one hip.
She whirled, singing,
to the drums of her own thunder.
Her hips tilted from side to side,
spilling out rain,
spilling out hail.
When her feet touched the ground,
she clothed herself in dark earth
and the flesh of animals,
took for a skirt a cornfield,
and as rattles she lifted, for a time,
three John Deere combines.
She howled through her own short life
and when she looked down
and saw that she had done enough,
she disappeared,
leaving her laughter, rolling,
behind.

Marc

She had been tied to the ground
so long
that every time the reins
were thrown down
she believed herself
bound.

She would stand,
crop grass
as far as she could reach
on an imagined tether
and shit under her feet,
and when the wolf came
her heart would not let her run,
her fear would not let her fight.

Facing Facts

The morning after
Is never as good
As the night before.
The bottles and cans
Are all empty
Or overturned.
The ashtray is a stale temple
Smoldering bits of your lungs.
You can't even remember
Your own name,
Much less his.
Strange argyle socks
And your underwear
Eloped to Mexico
In the night,
Legitimate and lost forever.
Fake cream curdles
In your instant coffee,
And your mother phones
To say she'll stop to chat.
Morning makes you
Make the bed
And pretend you got some sleep,
When all you really got
Was laid.

Aftertaste

Nothing turns my stomach
Quite so badly
As the lies you've fed me,
Dipped in just
Enough truth
To hide the rotten taste.
Sometimes it's hours
Before I realize
How much shit
I really swallowed.

A Midwinter's Night Dream

There were three of them in the van when the accident happened. There was Winter in the passenger's seat with her styrofoam cup full of goldfish. In the driver's seat of the van, before the accident, sat Winter's mother, Betty. Behind Betty and Winter, in the back of the van, where no windows admitted any light and the cold, dark air choked every sound -- there on a dingy mattress lay Governess, the child-dog.

Wrapped in warm, pink and red blankets, Governess cooed and cuddled herself tight into a ball, much as any child-dog is known to do. She proved a lovely creature with a luxurious brown coat, strong hands, an alert mouth (quick to smile), and a healthy, moist nose.

Governess belonged to Daniel, Winter's fiancée. There had been a previous marriage. Winter, however, had never met the "other woman."

Governess lived at Sara's house. Sara, Daniel's sister, kept Governess locked in a room with curtain and shades drawn. The child-dog spent her entire week in the room, curled most of the time on an old, tattered throw-rug in one dusty, vacant corner. She was visited, petted, and fed only once a week. The rest of the time a stale bowl of water was shoved through the door.

The first time she saw Governess, Winter's lips curled back in pity and disgust. The creature walked on two legs, hunched over as if it desired to fall to all fours. She was thin and skeletal, with the characteristic bloated belly of a malnourished body. Her eyes, large and wild, seemed too large for her thin, pinched face. And the coat, at that time, was dingy, dirty, and matted.

Winter's pity soon swallowed the disgust. She reached out and stroked the mistreated thing. Governess, in response, cooed and curled against Winter's leg.

Daniel's mother, Mrs. Didderson, was there when Winter did this -- when she reached out with complete compassion, with absolute care. With the lightning reflexes of a praying mantis, Mrs. Didderson sprinted across the room, hurtled the kitchen table, and grabbed Winter's hand, jerking it violently away.

"No!" She shouted, rapping Winter's rebellious knuckles.

"Do not touch that animal. Stay away from it."

"Why?" perpetually nonconforming Winter asked.

"Because."

"Because why?"

"Because we just don't do that. It's just not right."

Winter first appealed to Sara.

"Please let me in there, Sara. I won't tell your mother. Promise. Swear to God. I just want to feed Governess, pet her a little. You know. You know how it is. She looks so sick. Like she might die."

Sara was appalled, adamant, defiant, but not original with her answer. "No. No. Not a chance. Only on Sundays. We feed her only on Sundays."

Winter finally disobeyed all the rules. Sneaked in a window one night with some cold pizza and a glass of pepsi.

"Governess?"

The creature knew her friends, and she also smelled the food. She came running, panting and drooling.

"Here you go kid. Girl. What do I call you?"

The child-dog, propped on its more-human-than-not haunches, stared, still panting, up at the suspended relief. She said nothing. She probably couldn't. Winter knelt, unwrapped the aluminum foil around the greasy mushroom and black-olive slice. "Here. Here."

Governess needed no encouragement. She ate like pig.

Winter continued feeding Governess for several weeks. The results showed. The bloated belly disappeared. The eyes began to fit better in the skull. The coat took on a glossier shine. The bones grew stronger, resilient.

"I don't understand it," Mrs. Didderson remarked one Sunday over Governess' improved exterior. "But I knew it would work." Winter waited, tapping an impatient, nervous foot.

"Yep," Mrs. Didderson went on, "just like Grandma Best always told me. You feed a dog once a week, only ONCE a week. Never more. Feed it more, she told me, and the dog will be spoilt. Ruined. No damn good. You can give a dog as much water as you want, but only feed it once a week."

Daniel was gone a lot during those days. He was an itinerant obstetrician and veterinarian for slum areas nationwide. The National Association for the Betterment of American Slums (NABAS) sponsored him. His job was seventy-percent travel. The particular week that Winter decided to kidnap Governess (the same week of the accident) Daniel roomed in a desolate and dying hotel in the Cajun slums of New Orleans. He treated women who talked too fast for him to offer a decent prognosis. It was easier with the animals, they simply let you probe and explore and touch. No argument. Little resistance. A sick animal is very acquiescent.

Before Daniel had left for the Cajun slums, Winter told him how she had met Governess while he was in New York and what she was doing for her.

Daniel smiled. "Good, babe. I'm glad. You know my mother. It's impossible for me to convince her or even suggest to her that Grandma Best was wrong. When I'm here I do the same thing."

"You mean you have to sneak in and see her too?"

"Yeah. You know my mother."

"But Daniel, it's your child."

"I know, babe. But you know my mother."

What happened was this: Mrs. Didderson found Winter out. Caught her in the horrid criminal act of feeding a child-dog.

Winter was crawling through the window, basket of fruit, meat, and bread hooked over her arm when Mrs. Didderson drove up and saw her. Mrs. Didderson hysterified herself with tears, screams, and disapproving moans all around the house. Winter was then exiled, banned, kicked out of the house. Her future in the family became seriously threatened.

The actual kidnapping proved extremely simple. Winter went in the same window she had taken the food through. Arrogance kept that window unlocked. Even in broad daylight, she entered the house without a single paranoid neighbor's eye resting on her guilty back.

Betty parked across the street. Her foot tapped incessantly while she waited. Her fingers pinched tight the ignition key.

Inside the house, Governess leaped into Winter's arms and wildly licked her sweating brow.

"Ah, girl. It's okay. Yeah, kid. That's all right. It's gonna be just fine now. Nothing more to worry about. Yeah. It's gonna be just fine."

They prepared to leave. Governess did not seem the least bit hesitant about Winter's plans. They went out the front door after Winter discovered that no one else was home. Winter had turned back to turn off the front room lights when she noticed the goldfish.

"Um, go on, Governess, quick, get in the van with Betty, I'll be right there."

Governess sprinted across the street. Winter entered the kitchen, found a styrofoam cup, and retrieved the goldfish. She first captured them in a saucepan and then transferred them to the cup. She left the door unlocked as she followed Governess across the street, careful not to spill the fish. She ran like a woman with an overflowing cup of hot coffee.

They safely reached Dardenally Blvd. before the accident.

The accident went like this: Three cars ahead of the variegated trio's van, a station wagon carrying one mother and four small suburban terrorists hit a miniscule and possibly nonexistent patch of ice. The station wagon swerved, flipped sideways, and blocked both lanes of traffic. A car in the oncoming lane smashed into it,

smashing and crunching headlights, tail lights, and license plates. The flow on that side of the road stopped. On Winter and company's side things went much worse.

The car directly behind the tight and noisy wagon, a red and rusty Chevette, swerved to avoid the misdirected machine. It succeeded, but unfortunately hit a roadside embankment, flipped up and into the air, over and over, and landed on its top, crushing into jelly the driver. The car behind the Chevette was driven by (of all people) a friend of the late Grandma Best. She screamed, panicked, and finally remembered another Grandma Best sermon:

"Now remember. If you're ever in an accident, just swerve! Turn that buggin' wheel as hard as you can. Turn it! Jerk it! If you do, you'll always come out just fine."

Obeying that sermon, Grandma Best's old friend spun her car. She spun it completely around and politely kissed the radiator of the van -- her head firmly embedded itself into the aluminum honeycomb.

Inside the van, the sudden impact flung Winter's goldfish out of her open window. Betty banged her forehead on the rearview mirror, gashing the tender flesh above her eye. Governess flew forward, crashed between the bucket seats and split her lip on the gray-black ball of an unyielding stickshift.

After peeling herself from the van, Betty found her way to the shoulder of Dardenally Blvd., plopping down there on the black and gray gravel very much like a lost little girl. Open-mouthed she stared at the tiny foreign car embedded in the van's grill. Quietly, one shaking finger probed its way to the warm, sticky gash above her eye.

Governess sat on her haunches and lolled her head about, watching with diligence Winter's every move.

And Winter struggled, head-forward, to the side of the van. She propped herself against the slightly crinkled metal. Her tongue adhered painfully to her teeth. Distracted by flashes of light, she stared absently at the greenish-blue paint on the van.

There, in four neat and horrid spots, were the goldfish. Winter cried. One uncertain, unsteady hand reached up and stroked the bright, silvery orange and gold scales of one fish. With each stroke the scales undulated in waves of quick light, quick shadow. And the fish's eye opened, the fish's eye closed.

One and One

One and one
we pour
into the empty bowl
of other want

lacking nothing
in the giving

swing wide
the smooth gate
of your thigh
lay the cool
river-worn stone
of your breast
against the flushed
heat of my cheek
sigh
clasp your legs
about my cupped hand
flow over and in
slip your mouth
warm in the darkness
over the hard and soft
of me
I will kiss you until
we are falling
out of body
kiss you hard

fine grains of glass

fine grains of glass
spark briefly
and die emberless
behind the beam

this must be
the motion of stillness

drawn down
the night river

cicadas testing their pitch
against the perfect, even
endless song
of my passage

a dark full of sky
stars
no streetlights
for miles

For Norma, sleeping

First bed a thing on springs
no headboard or foot.
Steel coil level with outlet,
sparks on contact
at a moment most appropriate.
Bed two Tomahawk Motel/Lincoln Illinois
en route to receive the dusty blessing
of my decaying father.
We slept a bit on meringue-colored sheets
and kept our eyes on the shower curtain.
Bed three of plastic puffed with air,
grooves filled with sand,
Ste. Francois River
Next bed, bed four on wooden floor
with landlady below,
glass to the wall
hands in the garbage
retrieveing love letters
she couldn't understand.
Fifth bed drunken nights and fertile rites
a sly visitor from Milwaukee who escaped
our grasp.
Bed five held tight and quieted our child
with the radiated warmth
from the ground of his conception.
Bed six, a coastal one,
nearly futon in its hipness.
O San Diego nights! those Del Mar days.
The pallor of your skin
and the paunch of my belly:
tattletales to the sad Missouri truth.
Strangers in a land of the estranged
who lay bets on the crest
of tomorrow's wave.
Sixth bed below ocean stillness
we made our little Grace
and plans to return to the prairie
12 boxes in tow.

Tall bed seven,
princess and the pea.
The bed of a friend who
fed us greek salad
and blank checks
and lived with us
when we got again our own bed,
Bed eight.
The poverty bed The bed of tears
prescriptions and little emerging
spider eggs.
Eighth bed, the bed of fire.
The fire that softens
The fire that hardens
The fire that showed me
I love you in a way
most desperate
most divine
and most everlasting
through even the fire of
Bed eight,
bed of fear and doubt.
Beds nine
through eleven,
the softest of beds.
My hand rests
in the small of your back.

IN THE HEAT OF EDEN

She reached out
and touched
freedom --
knowledge and sin.
A hollow ache filled her,
forbidden and tempting,
and the ground moved
beneath her feet.

Cold, glittering snake eyes
pulled her closer;
the dance of his sinuous tongue,
like a hot coal
in her deepest parts,
spoke of hunger
and a beautiful death

and she knew
it was wrong.
She told herself
to move her hand

and she almost did
until she heard a voice,
warm and familiar,
whisper behind her --
and she could swear
it told her:

Go ahead.

II. A Little Death

Her hands cried
pain twisted
around the brass
rail, she tasted
fresh blood
biting into her lip,
felt blood
and a fire
between her legs.
No one had said
it would be like this.

touch

two hands intertwined,
sweaty slick and heated
our bodies joined
and the sheets
ceaseless and flowing
an ocean of material
bobbing and subsiding
with our circular motions
the air's humid with our emotions
our lips connected
we are each other's breath
our hearts are one
we are one life
and the sounds
like an eve in early spring
when no insects buzz
when no creatures move
when no winds blow
but the aura all around
communicates motion
your arms grasp me
and i smile
in the ebony forest
at how this began
with just
a
touch

Part I

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