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PORTRAIT

L I T E R A R Y M A G A Z I N E



S P R I N G 1 9 9 5

PORTRAIT

1995

BUFFALO STATE COLLEGE

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Table Of Contents

Jeffrey Adams — To Be Denied Publishing.....	5
Matt Andrews — My Father Raised the Sun.....	6
Anonymous — Mother and Firstborn, Father and I.....	8
Anonymous of Elmwood — Administrative Awareness.....	10
John W. Barrios — To A Young Dancer In Paris.....	11
— The Pool Cleaner.....	12
Barbara L. Buza — Perfection.....	13
John N. Efthemis — Broken Sole.....	14
— An Emotional Mobile.....	14
— Naked Masquerade.....	15
Holly Fritz — Poem to the Man in the Blue Business Suit....	16
— The Sum of Two.....	17
Tim Hansin — YAWN.....	18
Cindy Hermanson — Marbled Stone.....	19
Dave Hughes—on the hands of those leaving Plato's cave...20	20
—Mantra.....	20
Rebecca Kinsley — Driving Pains.....	21
— Dipping Eight Legs in the Inkwell.....	23
— Diary of a Catholic School Girl.....	24
Marvin J. LaHood — A Memory.....	26
SRM — NO POEMS.....	28
DK — (response to SRM).....	29
SRM — EYE OF THE HURRICANE.....	30
Anthony Neal — I Forgot To Tell You.....	31
Denise Ricotta — A Red Fairy Tale.....	32
Yolanda Solis — Mexican Housebuilding.....	34
Valerie Szurdak — Un Printemps.....	35
— Untitled.....	37
Melanie Updegraff — Life Still.....	38
— Banished.....	39
Peter J. Wiesen — All the Lousy Little Poets Coming Around.....	40
Last Night's Jazz.....	44
Christopher Lloyd Wood — The Dodger.....	47
Susan R. Woodward — In My Arms.....	54
Molly Rose Zeigler — Strangely Positive.....	55

To Be Denied Publishing

Remorse;
Saddened by the
quickness of it all.
Hours spent toiling over
verbs and adjectives
as a parent with
their child's first tricycle.
Wheels and rhyme must, after all,
be in alignment.
Any deviation from the stated
plans and directions
will result in utter disaster.
Your child riding off
on an unstable metaphor
bound to crash into rigid
structure and content.
All because you didn't
conform to buying
the damn thing preassembled.

Jeffrey M. Adams

My Father Raised the Sun

The darkness of early morning
loosely cups my waning dreams
which scatter for this moment,
spooked by the crows
whose laughter mocks
and hacks
my waking father,
as he raises the sun
so that I can see.

Still dark, his alarm, those crows, wake him,
re-open a scar that his dreams mend in the night.
He clicks on the closet light,
maybe for some pacifying warmth,
but for father there is none.
I slip an eye half awake
from beneath my warm, layered sheets,
peering broken glimpses of his hushed routine:
water splashes, hangars tinkle,
coffee pot sings,
all veiled in the ominous pre-dawn;
the cruelest moments of night
at full strength and threat,
frozen minutes that pace the cliff-edge of sunrise,
a perilous place for my father,
when a sixth sense reaches out
scalding itself on the cognition of mortality,
and when the human spirit alerts,
harrowed by grim eventuality,
anticipated the good of day
or dread
of the end.
Alone, my father's heart traverses this edge.

Keys rattle,
robotic feet fall,
not even a whisper to himself.
I can't help imagining he is on strings,
a half puppet, free only of choices.
Unwavering, he opens the door,
winter sprints in,
easily matching my father's strength,
but he steps through swiftly,
guarding that outside
doesn't reach me too soon.
But I sense the cold anyway,
indirectly, softly,
broken for me.

Door thuds closed.

The house will anxiously await its
creator's return,
but for now we can only warm the silence
with the trailing echoes
of father's nervous, muffled cough,
a faint message from just outside the door,
hinting of a younger man's lost dreams
slipped far and away,
growing more distant
with each slow morning walk to the car.
Twenty or so paces to himself.
The crows watch.
I can only roll and pull the covers taught,
trying to pick back up my own dreams
and maybe make them his;
forever wondering what he is thinking.

Matt Andrews

Mother and Firstborn, Father and I

This is how far we've come,
back to ignorance,
masquerades,
betrayal.
This time,
time has failed,
for just yesterday I was
ripped apart,
from the snow-smooth blanket
covering my shame, and
willfully drugged senses.

But somehow, the blame
still runs free.
I cannot see his face,
nor if he is monstrous
with many hands and mouths,
and only our small frames
to be wickedly sugar-coated
and devoured.

From this we grow to doubt
what we should cherish,
we distrust those with open hands
and an unfaltering gaze.
Our own eyes dart away,
hoping they won't see
our soiled, mangled souls.
(We couldn't really deserve
their tenderness and praise.)

Mother also had these tortures.
She bled and wept and
grasped for brilliance,
love, and creation.
(And so here we are.)
And will not wake her yet
with our shock revival
of stripped innocence.

Father just might break,
his heart has remained a child
through the trials of his women;
Mother, firstborn, and I.
We cannot steal from him
what loves us so fiercely.

The firstborn and I
will take our turn now,
this must come from inside us.
They must be born from our
desire to love unconditionally,
as parents do,
for their guarded us from
all they could fight.

Sisters have strength to
rival any beast, and this
childhood nightmare recurring
will not smother us,
for this time she and I
can tend each other.

Anonymous

Administrative Awareness (Advancement and Renewal)

Of course competence
Has nothing to do with it
Nor love of learning.
Shavian wisdom said
Those who can, do,
Those who cannot, teach.
Recent experience
Twists this once again.
Those who cannot teach
(For lack of interest ability
Or is it overweening greed)
Become administrators —
those who “minister”
to and for themselves.

Academe,
A world where
Only the tactics
Are meaner than
The stakes,
Where the mendacious
and metricious
seem in control
yet really stand steps
below those who sell
their bodies
(rather than abandoned minds)
since whores at least
are asked to perform
And may have
some talent.

Anonymous of Elmwood

To A Young Dancer In Paris

I have a memory. A parallel line
to keep me company. If this were
a small world... If parallel lines
could curve away... But they remain
parallel, as do the arcs in a rainbow
to the arc of your splendid back

reclining from the floodlights, the rehearsal
space, the stage of dreams reflecting
in the masonry of your chorus - life.
Bells are ringing in a chorus unheard,
save only for the two, it is ceaseless
atop the hollow church of unanswered prayers.

An endless calling, a tolling, tolling
for the Parisians to take a stand; legs moving
in the motion of one. The photographs
of gargoyles, the ceaseless tolling
in their ears like a candle burning
without flame, eternal. They keep close

watch with gentle, motionless care,
somehow ignorant of the meaning, yet still
smaller in the distance. A point of reference
remains like a North Star on a cloudy night.
Point A: remains. Point B: remains
on the stage with you in the spotlight

creating line after singular line, rising,
turning, curving away. Created and lost,
a figure in the maturing distance, a Ballerina
on wax, yearning for the choir of movement
to raise their voices and sing your name,
but they remain unheard, save only for the two.

John W. Barrios

The Pool Cleaner

Gordon was cleaning his pool. First he let out all the water. He did this by putting one end of a hose in the water and sucking out of the other until water flowed from his pool through the hose and into the bushes behind the pool.

Then he climbed into the pool and washed the walls and the floor with a scrub brush and plenty of soap. He hosed out the soap and let it rinse through the drain. The next day he repeated the scrubbing.

"What are you going to do now?" asked his wife the next evening.

"I'm not sure."

"It sure looks clean."

"Yeah."

"I haven't seen it look that clean since we first had it put in."

"I know, its clean." He walked out to the back patio and looked up to the sky. It was a pale dark sky full of clouds. No stars. Crickets and the swallowing of beer were the sounds of night. His wife did the dishes. When she was finished she smoked with him.

"I talked to Larry this afternoon, he said he wants to buy Linda's car. He can use it for his daughter." His wife took a long drag and went on. "I told him that I had to talk to you first, but that it would probably be alright. What do you think?"

He finished the last gulp of beer and said, "That sounds like a good idea. If his daughter needs the car, I think it's a very good idea."

"I'll call him tomorrow and let him know."

He opened another beer from his six-pack.

"You should come in soon, it looks like it's going to rain tonight."

"I'll be in later. I want to watch." His wife put out her cigarette and went inside. He heard the television come on and he knew it would be on all night. He would watch the rain and then go in and go to bed. His wife watched television until she finished her pack of cigarettes and then joined him in bed. They don't make love anymore.

In the morning he found the pool full again with rain. He got the hose out and began draining before breakfast. The people who installed the pool were coming that afternoon to fill it up with dirt. He wasn't taking any more chances. He planned on putting in a vegetable garden or a flower bed.

At breakfast he sat in Linda's chair and wept over his bowl of corn flakes. His wife slept in until noon.

By John Barrios

Perfection

I can see the weeping trees;
I can hear the flowers scream;
I can feel their pain and sorrow -
The strive for perfection.

Perfection has a price
Too high and unpalatable
Than anything can pay.

We kill perfection in nature,
Putting it on display -
In our homes and lives;
We are not content to see it from afar.

We must possess it;
We must contain it;
Search out its secret
And imitate it - within ourselves.

If not perfection it is left alone
Finds its own way
Striving for survival
The imperfection will endure.

Strengthen the character
Persevere -

I strip myself of the foliage
Exposing my naked body.
I will lie within the winter,
My imperfections will shield me -
They are my survival.

Barbara L. Buza

Broken Sole

From the quicksand's belly emerged
Another offspring of the dysfunctional deity.
A body no different than the innocent
But tainted predecessors.
Cynics from their detached podiums spew
Statistics and labels exploiting the
Entity, while loneliness paints a
World absent of self love.
Still, from the crack inside the concrete
Slab that we walk on daily,
A tuft of grass full of
resilience and life grows.

John N. Efthemis

An Emotional Mobile

A stream of stained glass
Rushes over the heart while
Broken colors hang from my smile.
Prying fingers send a piercing light through
The drawn shades of a filled embrace.
A falling tear screams...
"But all dolls cry."
Emptiness's lullaby is familiar to the
Spirit pushed from its flesh.
A stretched lifeless canopy,
Keeping your swings dry.

John N. Efthemis

Naked Masquerade

Truth's convictions are shredded
Through a desensitized badge,
As a helpless victim sprawled across your
Hood quenches your ego's vile cravings.
The hanging night stick and gun feed
Perspiring hands ready without thought,
To alleviate the burden.
Possessed by a quota, infraction bleeds into
innocence when hypocrisy overflows
Into your actions.
Leaving you amongst the felons you
Contend to protect us from.

John N. Efthemis

Poem to the Man in the Blue Business Suit

The ground grows
harder beneath my
feet. The wind unbuttons my
dress, chilling unshaved legs in damp stockings. Strangers

whiz by with
hollow eyes and curved
spines, never noticing my
half-moon smile and dancing legs. Only
you scrape your

eyes off the
concrete earth to look
at my mouth stopped up with dirt
and burrow the tip of your tongue deep
inside my

watery walls.
I taste your breath and
dig my toes further into
the resistant ground, feeling the warmth
of your stranger's kiss.

Holly Fritz

The Sum of Two

Driving in silence, encased in steel
we two move as one toward the
cold sterility of strangers, to feel
gloved hands and the weight of

waiting-room smiles on a half-full belly.
Magazine covers blanket our
lemonade tears, absently
splashing where the nurses scour.

Echoes of our name bounce from pursed
lips. Shrouded in sand-paper blue, they
lead us through a metallic burst
of surgical steel to weigh

the sum of two, me and you.
I close my eyes and imagine
I feel the punch of your two
small fists, penetrating the in-

side of my watery womb, but look down
at the flatness of a half-empty
belly and a faceless frown.
Abandoning the safety

of a stethoscope's kiss, I slide
unshaved ankles through silver
hoops. Tugging the paper blanket, I hide
your tiny unseen quiver,

anticipating the sharp pain of
your removal from my
fertile haven. I scrape the love
from uterine walls and cry
for the division of two and the hollowness
of one. With scalpels laid to rest
I rise and proceed to dress,
repeating their words, "It's all for the best."

Holly Fritz

YAWN

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by boredom,
hungry complacent in pajamas
dragging themselves off the couch at dusk looking for
food that's easy to prepare
Sleepy headed hipsters pacing humming along with the microwave,
impatient for pizza or chicken pot pie
who watched the "easy hair" infomercial several times over
because they couldn't find the remote,
who masturbated eight times in one afternoon starching
an old towel with their sticky fluid,
who filled ashtrays to overflowing trying to think
of something to do,
who spent paychecks at the bar gulping stale pissy beer
hoping to fall in love,
who allowed themselves to be fucked by lying assholes
hoping to fall in love,
who stared out the window played solitaire thought about
laundry then took a nap,
Who did bong hits to howling melancholy of Nirvana discs
on Sunday morning defying bloodshot fuzzy nausea,
who snorted piles of coke and heroin off wardrobe mirrors
because it made their hearts race on Friday night,
who gazed glassy eyed surfing fifty-three channels looking
for heroes, finding sad clowns and happy suicides,
and vapid product,
who yawned on their backs stretching pulling
dog haired couch blankets up to their chins,
who yawned again on their sides searching for the remote
thinking about a snack.

Inspired by "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg

Tim Hasin

Marbled Stone

Marbled stone shaded like salmon,
here I lay a yellow rose,
where a name etched in blackness
bears the weight of all my questions.

The child remembers a white row boat on the lake,
and a green firebird in the yard,
anger,
and fear.

The girl remembers awkward silences,
funeral parlors,
where the name's face spoke only silence.
Why cannot violate the quiet,
you are gone.

My father's tears fall upon your face,
for his pain the woman will rage upon marbled stone.
No rage can violate this quiet,
no tears,
no why,
no fear,
no anger,
no yellow rose.

Cindy Hermanson

on the hands of those leaving Plato's cave

you see
the light is

different here.
and

we ask:
what good comes from disproving perception?
dream or not
weeds' marginal beauty is still unattainable.
so was the moon,
once.

and here in the light;
touching, holding, grasping,
it all comes to us now.

Dave Hughes

Mantra

internal voices are heard, rising
toward enlightenment.
multitudes,
repetition --
failure.

your movements are a true mantra,
voiceless, saying: I am the path.

if alive
Venus would be jealous,
Apollo speechless,
Zeus impotent (momentarily).

but the Buddha of neglect
would wimper.

Dave Hughes

Driving Pains

Drunk driving with my dad
at the age of twelve was
such a rush.
Burning down highways
past midnight,
past curfew,
past the point of this.
Blowing-off
bloated suburban cops
nodding at the wheel.
I blew out the speakers,
spilled beer in my lap,
looked to the man on my right
saw James Cagney,
James Dean,
Dean Stockwell,
The Highwaymen,
laughed out loud,
and thought we'd never stop.
Drunk driving with my dad
at the age of twelve was
drag racing down strips
we created for ourselves.
Slammed gas,
changed gears,
blasted through night,
blasted past streaks,
blasted out of our minds.
We skid on dry pavement
cursed into cool air,
connecting ourselves,
disconnecting the world.
Screamed "Burn baby Burn"
looked through smokied eyes,
saw my face in profile
blazing away,
never got caught
and thought,
that summer could never end.

Drunk driving with my dad
at the age of twelve was
nostalgic drive-in dreams
left to end
long ago.
Rewound to a watered-down version
meant to impress what
was meant to be missed,
left me wondering
what a wonder it would be
if I should live
to see thirteen.

Rebecca Kinsley

Dipping Eight Legs in the Inkwel (Spider)

I concentrate to rid my mind of webs
that spun themselves at such great depth and length
so intricate the threads that rock and ebb
and in this movement duplicate their strength.

What was this thought that made me first attempt
to shake all other thoughts that do deceive?
A memory, or something newly dreamt
a break from what I usually perceive.

A spider moving slowly on a ledge
I squint to see what image it projects
I wonder at such paradox of dread
a hint of what my own mind might reflect.

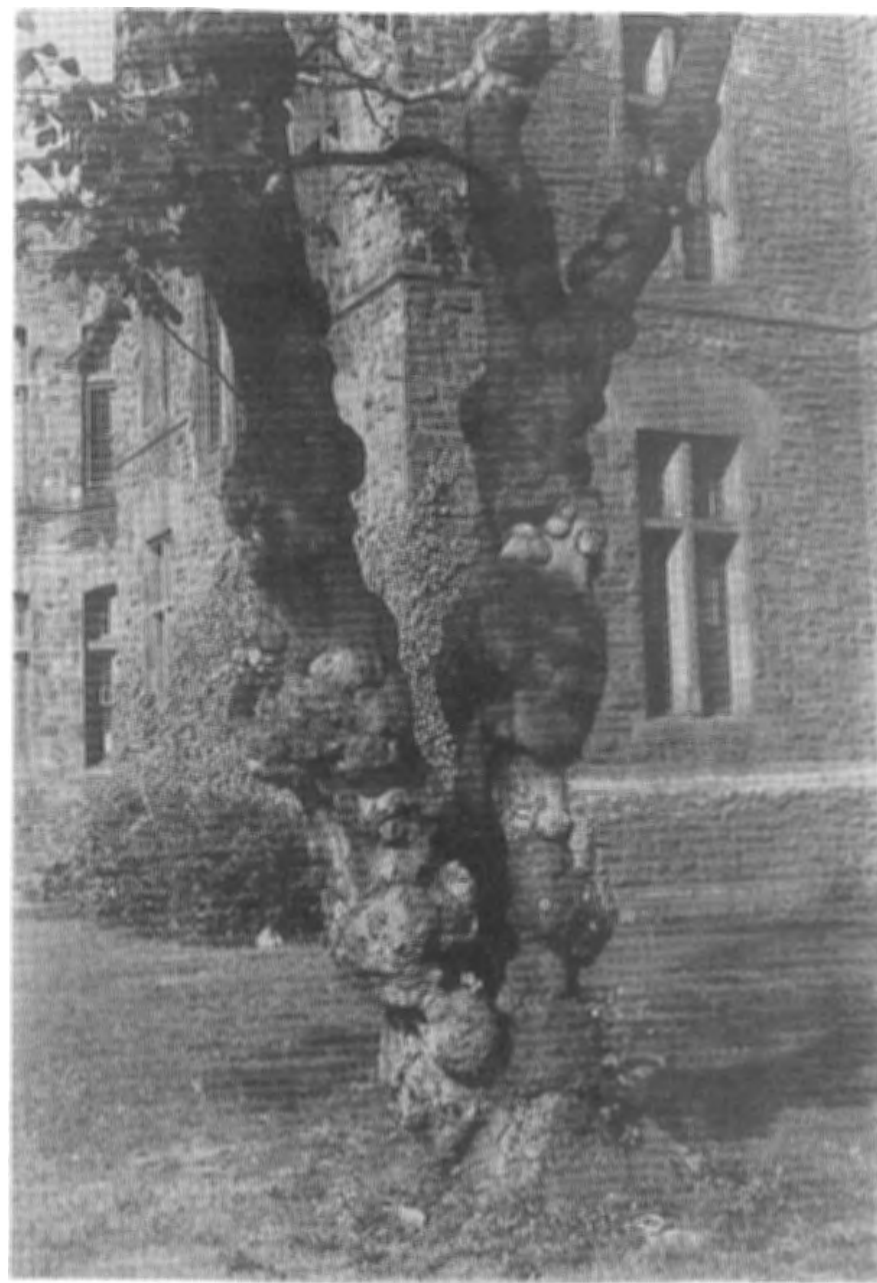
Creative threads so that one might enjoy
more fully than those ends which we destroy.

Rebecca Kinsley

Diary of a Catholic School Girl

Dear God,
I have a few things that I'd like to point out to you
to ask and demand of you once and for all -- Please
Quit dancing on my spirit.
Oh God,
It's not like I'm convinced whether or not I really believe in you,
but I have sat in your House trying to read you,
wincing under the weight of such foolish expectations --
(you can't decide between your honor or your pride) --
and I, strain with my struggle to take you in stride.
Dear God,
Haven't I suffered these confusions enough
but to have to sit quietly with my legs crossed
for hours in these rock-hard pews (trying not to falter,
while I stare at the form of your firm, naked body (laying prone on the
altar.)
Oh God --
I envision myself cleansing you with my own hair
but I can't just stop at your feet and it isn't exactly water --
Oh Yes God -- Please
Your words tease, and I, could be born again.
Dear God,
is that you still silently stalking me
while I've done everything in spite of your incessant haunting me
-- but nothing can save me now...
Oh God!
Damn me to hell once and for all
when I realize that it's your name I've just called out
and it's you who are born and dies through me as I once again
offer myself up to be, crucified on secular sheets.
Dear God --
I cannot even begin to describe what my own mind sees
when I'm offered the promise of you, coming, into me...
And You -- You drink of my blood and eat of my flesh -- Please
Stop burning up my soul.
Oh God,
You Grand politician -- you know what I'm wishing in the fear
and the promise that you'll always be listening, but Please,
sometimes a girl just needs to be alone.

Rebecca Kinsley



Melanie Re

A MEMORY

The speaker drones on,
A blur of words in monotone.
The mind, self-protecting, wanders.
The past is present again.
Is it the past as it was,
Or how we have remembered it?
The face in the mind's eye.
Did it ever exist so?
Did it ever exist even then,
Except as we saw it?

Is memory a double trick,
A re-distortion of a past distortion?
Or is it a re-focusing of something
Already focused?

I can see my father more clearly
Than when we lived.
He has become the symbol
Of a symbol.

His remembered attributes,
Only obscurely grasped once,
Have sorted themselves out
So that a few are him.
His image has become
As clear as a fiction.
He seems to be his attributes.

He stands by the river where
He fished contentedly.
A train whistle is his song
In love of his beloved railroad.
He leans on the counter of
His grocery store, smiling,
Or stands in the doorway with
Gifts of vegetables from his garden.

Memory is like an author,
Culling out the inessential,
Emphasizing what truly made
Him what he was to us.

It is a gift, this trick
Of the mind,
It is the miner's pan,
Sifting out the gold.
My father is before me,
Shining clear of his dross,
Simple and perfect,
A memory.

Marvin J. LaHood

NO POEMS

I have come through
A spell of no poems, a
Crucible, so to speak -
In other words, a pissant
Awful time. When New Year's Eve
Came round, I was out in the
Yard, baying at the fireworks.
On New Year's Day, I
Baked shepherd's pie,
Boiled black-eyed peas,
Shook strung bones at
The moon, and sacrificed
A virgin...pair of socks.
Placed an ad in the Orchard
Park Bee announcing
That I would be
Responsible for NO MORE
Kharmic debts, and, best
Of all, I hung
Garlic around my neck! Nobody
Hassles me anymore. Nobody
Better not; I am
Flat terrifying!

-SRM

(Response to SRM)

Strange dialect for the Orchard.
Black-eyed peas in the oven,
mad woman in the porch yard
be she one witch or whole coven,
I told you Ralph says Sophia
we shoulda bought that place
in East Aurora. Give me a
two-barreled shotgun, or can of mace.
But Ralph was a bank president.
Can't hit her from here, Sophie.
Wait till she applies for a grant.
Well, that was all in the Bee.
'Local witch threat abating.'
Usual method for the Park: dunked, can't float on credit rating.'

Once more the yuppies light the dark.

-DK

EYE OF THE HURRICANE

I told you, now,
I swear I did,
What happened New Year's Day,
But
Even I am freaked!

When it caused the
Sleeping snowman
To
Make his
New toy speak....

I KNEW!

It fails
Imagination
The havoc
I can wreak!

-SRM

I Forgot To Tell You

Last night -
After I hung up the phone -
I realized
I forgot to tell you
That it was raining...
Forgot to mention
That I have dreams
That far exceed these puddles.

At last, it seems
Some vague fraternity
Of unabashed longing-
I simply forgot to tell you-
Perhaps we'd still be talking
And I'd tell you that
The rain turned to snow
And these puddles are all frozen.
In them I no longer see
A reflection of myself-
Something about things opaque
And mysteries yet written.

Anthony Neal

A Red Fairy Tale

Princess Sara was perfect in every way except one; she had the reddest hair anyone had ever seen. The king and queen were proud of their daughter, but they often worried about her for no one in the whole kingdom had hair as red as Sara.

"Someday she may get into trouble all because of her red hair," the king moaned as he told the queen.

"We should send for the red fairy Crina and ask her to protect our daughter," the queen said.

Soon a little red fairy appeared.

"Is this the child with the reddest hair?" the fairy asked the queen.

"Yes," the queen replied, "this is Sara."

"Well, Sara, my name is Crina and I shall protect you from anyone who would hurt you for such beautiful hair." Crina told the princess.

One day a dragon came through the forest, pulling up trees and knocking over anything in his way. The dragon had heard of Sara's red hair, and told the king he would destroy the villages and forests until he had every strand of it.

Sara went to Fairy Crina and told her the news of the dragon.

"What does he want with my red hair?" Sara asked.

"Every year all the dragons gather together to compare their treasures. The one with the best treasure wins," Fairy Crina explained to Sara.

"What does he win?" Sara asked.

"How should I know? I am not a dragon!" Fairy Crina exclaimed.

"Princess Sara, you have to let the dragon see you. I have enough power to protect you and together we shall scare him away."

"I'll just stay here and you go off and scare the dragon away yourself," Sara told her.

"The dragon will just wait a few years and then come back. If you want to get rid of him once and for all, he has to see your red hair," Fairy Crina explained.

"What if something goes wrong, and your magic cannot protect me?" Sara said, because she was scared to go with Crina.

"Nothing will go wrong as long as we are together," Fairy Crina said firmly.

"But Crina, the dragon is so big and we are so small. How can we fight him?" Sara asked.

"We do not need to fight him Princess, only to convince him that he does not need all of your hair," Crina explained.

"How are we going to do that?" Sara asked.

"I have a plan that cannot fail if we work together," Fairy Crina told her.

"Together we will stand up to that mean old dragon!" Sara announced.

The next day, Fairy Crina and Princess Sara set off to see the dragon. They came to a clearing in the woods where the dragon lay sleeping.

"Have no fear, Princess Sara, I am here to protect you," Crina said.

"I am only a little scared," Sara admitted.

Just then the dragon woke up and saw the two of them standing before him.

"So this is the Princess with the red hair," the dragon began. "It certainly is the reddest hair I have ever seen. It will make a great treasure."

"I have a lock of it here for you," Sara told the dragon.

"Oh no Princess," the dragon laughed, "I must have it all; every strand."

"And what will I be left with?" Sara asked him.

"A bald head." The dragon answered her.

"A princess with a bald head!" Fairy Crina said, "she would be laughed right out of the kingdom!"

"Why should I care about that?" the dragon asked, snidely.

"Why should I care if you get a treasure?" Sara said calmly.

"And you will not have a kingdom to make you a princess," the dragon said.

"It seems we need a compromise," Fairy Crina said.

"What is a compromise?" the dragon asked her.

"It is an agreement made by two people who both want something badly," Crina explained. "You want Sara's hair, and Sara wants her kingdom, so you both need to make a fair agreement with one another."

"If I give you a lock of my red hair, you will be the only dragon to carry a lock of hair from a princess," Sara offered.

The dragon thought about it and then said, "Such a lock of red hair from such a sweet princess is treasure in itself."

"It is agreed then," said Crina, "Sara will give you a lock of her hair and you shall leave her kingdom alone."

"Agreed," said Sara.

"Agreed," said the dragon.

So Sara gave the dragon a lock of her hair, and he left the kingdom alone. That year when he met with the other dragons they declared his treasure to be the best. After winning, he told them about Sara, and made sure no other dragon would ever bother her kingdom again.

Denise Ricotta

Mexican Housebuilding

This cynicism, bright steel
that we burnish through the twelvehour days:
acero la espada contra pena de plomo.

- Pesa menos.

But, oh, how it glitters!

- Y la verdad?

Entre plomo y acero,
warm wooden hammerhandles
of joy.

Yolanda Solis

Un Printemps

I. Grand Chef

Et alors papa --

I can still hear you boiling about the kitchen
suspended by your apron of perspiration,
as you baked flour and sifted it
into two small female selves.

We rose from a distance, fearing the man
whose hands held rippling veins
calloused by the living he made.

Each time you pulled your head from the oven
your brows balded while deep hues of blue
scalded towards your temples.

Your lips chewed thinly, 'mange, mange mes petites.'

We played in your memory as you cultivated
every dish as a landscape. L Ones you could pack up as leftovers,
take home, and keep you sane.

II. Petit Pere

I remember the first time
your fingers confronted my cheek.

It sounded as loud as the pitter--
pattering of my feet; playful
but woke you. It was our first war.

You stood hunched over like an
eighty year old arab with tired wrinkles
deeper than the folds of the bed sheets draping you.
Humility died in my cheeks, integrity too difficult to reach.

Once we took a trip to the mountains,
mother said, "you and your father.'

What a strange message.

Could he give me a song or
dress me into the womb?

Papa -- qui etre vous?

III. Sois Artiste

The front car seat absorbed me.
My feet hung off the edge, reaching for the floor -- eternal.
My head jolted as graveling rocks put a stop
to our big jeep thing.
Then you reached out for the wood and
the young pear tree you planted.
Caterpillar branches stroked our
fingertips like thistles of a paint brush.
Your breath became light and cautious.
Your eyes watched the spread of wind burrowing
through a sun, exiled into leafy clouds.
I felt the trunk to where some ants lived
hollowing out its bark.
We pondered tiny green nipples that would
expand like hot glass under a blow torch.
The buds knew this of themselves and
of what they would become --
pulp behind jaws and sweet juices between gums.
We stood, arms folding like branches;
blood rooting in the great vein of earth
I never knew existed, until
I heard you say, 'nous sommes arrive.'

Valerie Szurdak

Untitled

Ankles tied in winter laces
snow crunching diluted sea-salts.
It's a barren walkway, left like
tea-bagged china of morning.

If only parallel lines could curve away...:
Carve a tunnel for my fallen back,
vertebrae by vertebrae, ring by ring.
Inferno snowfall into layers
as child's limbs do in lap limbo.
Hello manhole.
Steaming, blackhole sterness
holding scatterfall
to melt your grooves.

I step over the warmthL feeling my hems escaping.
My legs are a furnace
my mind, fallen snow.

Valerie Szurdak

LIFE STILL

I watch the little boy,
pale green eyes, plays
with the sun in a puddle,
stomps the mud to show his fun.
And I can laugh out loud with him.

I watched my mother
become a lost child.
Now she is the eldest,
and we can bear her until
she feels firm ground.
I can save my tears
For a Sunday matinee.

I can see the lovers
from hundred year old eyes;
it does feel that far.
Now I will stay here.
Here, I can bleed clearly.

I don't want to go outside,
today there is so much, I
feel too much.
It is such a universe,
and I am drained as I
brim over with the world.

I'd hoped to see my home,
but the eyes remain veiled.
For now I'll fall in
with an angel's voice,
reeling brilliance,
the stories of a genius,
and the bright, blind sun.

Melanie Updegraff

BANISHED

Yes I want to hear all
you have to tell this time.
I promise silence, at least,
I leave the door open
for confession, compassion,
a small piece of wisdom.

The boundaries that hold me together
can drink your fatigue,
I can take this from you. And you will stay warm,
breathe without thinking,
so easy to love.

Now I will dance around this,
my face painted in joy,
swallowed by each step.
I can play this part again, and
with the flames at arms' length
I will stay awake,
awaiting to tend to the truth.

Melanie Updegraff

"All the Lousy Little Poets Coming Around"

A friend and I were discussing the topic of writing, literature, and poetry and we both pointed out numerous disturbing trends among today's upstart poets. While neither of us claim to be a master of any art, I feel the need to put to paper these observations so that future scholars (if there are any) can look back upon this age and know why nothing of consequence was written in Buffalo, New York. I also hope to offer an apology to future generations and clear my name from the list of proponents of this "non-movement."

The first of the disturbing trends among the would-be-poets is the quantity of abstract-cliche poetry which is being produced (and more disturbingly, submitted to the published as serious works) in which there is no base in reality. In these works, it is often a struggle to find anything concrete. It is my observation that these poets are merely dreamers who float from one cliché and trite expression to the next and rarely concern themselves with the content of their piece. They usually sacrifice content for easy rhymes such as: "My heart is on fire" and: "My burning desire," or some such drivel. I offer to these cliché poets who tell me repeatedly that everything is left up to fate and destiny that maybe it is their destiny to take a class seriously geared toward writing with some intent.

Intertwined with these cliché-poets are a group I'll refer to as the surface-poets. The surface-poets often tell the reader exactly how they feel with highly overused words such as love, hate, passion, and remorse. Perhaps they feel too ashamed to bear their soul to the readers or perhaps they don't know how to dig through the ambiguity that these "surface-words" create. In either case, the surface-poets rarely cause any stir of emotion in the reader and they almost never create any kind of bond. To the surface-poets I offer this advice: if you SHOW the reader a person or situation of emotion in an effective manner the reader will recognize it and associate with that emotion. If a person is feeling hateful, explain the reason for the hate or show what he does about the hate. A perfect analogy is one of the cartoonist who can show a person who is surprised without writing "SURPRISE!" on the character's forehead. In the same way, a poet can show an emotion without naming it.

The next disturbing trend I wish to address is that of the scene-poet. No doubt you have seen them staggering around Allentown, hanging out in the "Nouveau-chic" fifties-style coffeehouses, trying to be "hip to jazz," wearing black turtlenecks, and Southern Comfort on their breath. When asked why they drink, they usually offer up some pre-made excuse like: "Man, I'm a poet and therefore I feel more than anyone. I drink to escape the immense pain I feel." However, true poets are renowned for confronting and battling with their emotions and feelings rather than running from them. Basically, these "scene-poets" are more in love with the idea of being a poet than the need they have for putting their experiences and emotions on paper; and it

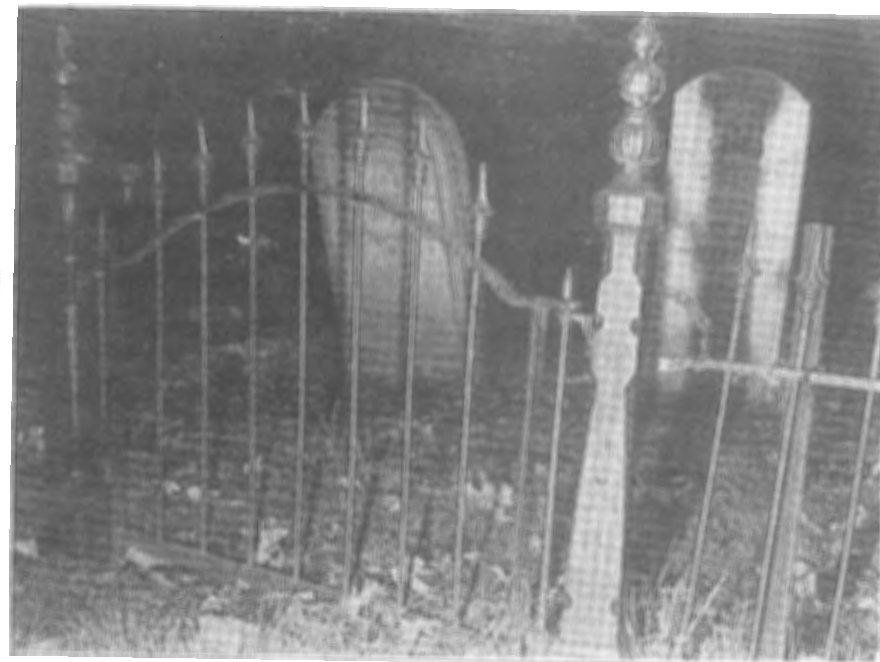
usually shows in their work which is invariably void of coherence, form, style, and revision. When confronted about their "art" they usually offer an excuse such as: "I was so drunk when I wrote that. But it is a testament to my ability as an artist that I could even hold the pen." Untrue, I say. It is more an embarrassment to your supposed art and the writing is still drivel. Notice, too, that these poets usually travel in incestuous packs reminiscent of a rock star and his groupies or a politician and his supporters. A true poet would take an example from Wallace Stevens, a Pulitzer-Prize-winning American Poet, who worked for years in the field of "business" without his colleagues ever knowing he was a renowned poet.

The same poets are often given to the "truth through spontaneity" ideal popularized by Jack Kerouac. Thus, they feel no need to revise any of their work - and it shows. While in theory it is an interesting hypothesis, in reality it rarely is successful. Are these spontaneous-poets claiming an insight into the passions and feelings that have baffled even the greatest minds throughout existence? I feel that this cannot be so because no passion or feeling can begin to be understood without truthful contemplation, revision, and trial-and-error. It is obvious to me that these spontaneous poets are lazy and looking for the quickest and most painless way to recognition. Now, I pose this question: Of all the Beat Generation poets that the spontaneous poets admire, who will be considered as literary figures because of their poetry in the future? The answer clearly seems to be Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and possibly Gregory Corso. Oddly enough, they are all patient artists who carefully and painstakingly revised their work. Kerouac, who believed in spontaneous poetry, leaves behind a semi-coherent repertoire of wasted print and paper. Clearly, Kerouac's prose style will be remembered and regarded as groundbreaking, but not his poetry.

Another trend I have noticed is that of the condemnation-poets. Specifically, it is a poetry which reads like a litany of social problems and complaints against society. The intention here is (I believe) an attempt to bring into view the problems so they can be solved; an intention already undertaken by tabloid magazines and tabloid television programs. However, there are far too many of these muckrakers and not nearly enough problem-solvers. As I read through this muckraking poetry, I cannot help but notice the influence of the Beat Generation on it also; this time in the form of the influence of Ginsberg's HOWL. The influencing part of HOWL is obviously the first part in which Ginsberg runs down a litany of social problems and atrocities. But the poem is much more than that. Ginsberg goes on to identify the problem and offer an attempt at how to correct and eliminate the problem. Unfortunately, the condemnation-poets apparently only read and imitate the first part of this poem: the litany of atrocities and as a result end up sounding like whining little brats. By trying to expose the problem, they only create another.

Finally, I turn my attention to those who believe they will be "intellectualized" by poetry. They are generally pompous individuals who think that poetry (and literature in general) is something to be tamed in order to show off their intellectual prowess. It is much the same as one would master the playing of the violin or fully comprehend the workings of the hard sciences. This sort of taming of poetry is not possible though. Poetry deals with emotions, feelings, and an ever-changing language. No matter how much you write you will never be a virtuoso poet because each new poem is a humbling experience and a tabula rasa (blank slate). No matter how much you study, there are no rules or guidelines to go by as in the hard sciences. No matter how much you read you will never fully comprehend a poem because you cannot get inside the poet's mind. With every new poem you read or write you must open yourself--and yourself only, for there can be no replacement--wholly and completely to experience the feeling and emotion and bring your own experiences and emotions to the poem. Therefore, each reading of a poem is unique to the individual. Furthermore, in regards to the writing of a poem you must continually dig deeper and deeper and when you believe you've mastered that particular emotion or poem, be humbled! Be humbled, for you have just begun.

Peter J. Wiesen



Jeffrey C. Dickhut

Last Night's Jazz

...and from the trumpet came
the sound of butterflies
and rabbits and tall
green grass growing
in a peaceful field
while the wolves slept
and it was a fateful--
but not fatal--
final sound
with the echoes of the
promise of a new beginning
and the overtones of
justice swift and clean
and fair filled the air,
replaced it with a
blue sky and rainbow
and soft snow
to exist all at once.

...and the bartender,
with his money-eyes,
laughs "Can you believe
this kid? Walks in off
the street and asks to play--
no pay--
one day.
I say 'Sure.
Got nothin' to lose.'
Got nothin' to lose,
Kid's got no shoes,
just that bleacher-than-white
robe and that death-pale skin.
Prob'ly never sees the sun,
that one,
spends ev'ry second
trapped and practicing
to make those angelic sounds."

...and the crowd in this World--
the pseudo-beats chanting
to the beat Go! Go! Go!
and he does! does! does!
with love! love! love!
for a sound of his silver horn--
with a ragged, torn,

thread-bare, re-born
spiritually of cosmic, man, cosmic
vibrations and citations,
create hazing dull
backdrops to one
supreme tune:
The Apocalypse Blues;
an Armageddon Jam
tidelwaving,
overflowing
second-rate
shams and shamen,
bursting dams and laymen,
and the hey-mon hey-men--
a once forbidden song
lasting eternity long
but everyone has it wrong
because they hear the music
the tune the jam the song
the long wrong song
in the long hot night
and the shamen & laymen
& priests & beasts &
kings & things &
poets & know-it-alls &
save-your-soul 1-900 calls
fight over christ &
buddha &
muhammad &
zeus
but lose the tune
the song
the true tune of
that white angelic horn
which adorns all listeners
all hearers
all seers.

...and as the horn
begins to blow sad
and shakily into the
dark blue night
the harking trumpeteer
steers the makeshift band
into a fanfare
suitable to all eternity's
kings. Bartender,

sad, teary-eyed,
then patriotic lets forth
a "Last Call!"
to friends and foes
to end their woes
and settle scores
one more time.
Then the angel-white
horn-master floats
through the crowd,
out the door,
and to the next bar,
blowing a last night of jazz
to an otherwise ignorant world.

Peter J. Wiesen

The Dodger

1.

Parker slipped out of the house and into the city air. Before the heavy screen door had a chance to slam shut he had cleared the walkway and was side stepping an old man who was waiting for his dog to finish pissing on the sidewalk just beneath a large, barren maple tree. The air made Parker sink into his jacket and savor the warmth of his own breath as he ran. Still enough time to catch the seven o'clock bus.

"If I don't just go," he said half out loud, "I never will get there."

The street lamps dotted the sidewalk as far as he could see. The city was as normal as it was on any other night, there were sounds of cars and horns and the general roar that surrounded it all. But now it seemed that all he could hear was the sound of his footsteps and the cloth against cloth sounds of the pack slung over his shoulder.

He rounded the corner and headed straight for the park. He knew he could make up some time just by cutting through the playground rather than taking following the street to the bus stop.

2.

"Not a bad day for a hunt," Jack thought to himself as he took a nip from his full size flask. (The one that took up the whole inside pocket of his heavy Carhart jacket.) The thing was so cold that it nearly stuck to his lips, but once the sweet liquid bit at his throat it warmed him to the core. Jack wiped off his mouth with the sleeve of his jacket and ran his hand over the three day old stubble on his face. He stepped off the back porch of his cabin, which seemed to have become his permanent residence, and headed out across the large field near the woods.

Winter had finally decided to settle in after a brief contradiction with Fall. The ground was solid and it was frosted over with a thin layer of snow that had fallen during the night. Jack walked through the bitter dawn air and smiled at every step. He couldn't help but get a kick out of the way the snow crunched beneath his feet when he could laugh at the cold from inside his warm clothes. It was as if he were saying, "Eat shit Mother Nature!" But with the utmost respect for her power. He knew full well that she could flatten him like a Mack truck and not even feel the bump. But this was one of those times when he had her beat.

The wind swirled around him, sweeping up the dusting of snow and pelting it against his face. It stung his skin but it only made him feel warmer inside and more like a man. He downed another gulp from the flask and shuddered a bit as it burned it's way into his belly.

After about ten minutes Jack decided that the wind wasn't going to let up any time soon so it would be best to head for the shelter of the woods. Under his breath he mumbled an apology to Mother Nature, put his head down and trudged on.

3.

Soon the bus stop was in view. He couldn't see inside because of the graffiti, but Parker thought that the light coming from it looked almost inviting. As he walked into the little glass shelter he was startled to see an older man settled into the corner on the ground. The whole shelter was only about the size of a large dumpster so it would have been tough to spit without hitting him. The man was just sitting there leaning up against a big duffel bag that was full of who knows what. His clothes were ragged and torn and his boots looked about five sizes too big. His shaggy gray beard and wild hair almost made him look like Santa Clause after a hard night out. Red nose and all.

"Hey pal, have you got a light?" the bum said in a raspy voice as he rummaged around his bag of treasures and managed to pull out a half of a broken cigarette.

"Yeah, actually, I do. I don't smoke but my wife does. I guess it's just a habit for me to keep a lighter in my pocket."

Parker pulled a small red lighter from his inside pocket and tossed it over to the man.

"You can keep it if you want." He said. "I don't need it anymore."

"Hey thanks, that's mighty kind of ya."

The old man lit his cigarette and took a long drag. He tossed the lighter into his bag and just sat there looking at Parker while he let the smoke trickle out of his nose over the yellow stained mustache and into the air.

"Why do you keep staring at me?" said Parker after a few minutes.

"Nobody else here."

"Well, I wish you wouldn't. It makes me nervous."

"You can call me Red." Was all the man replied.

"Well thank you." said Parker in a snotty voice. "I'll remember that if I feel like talking. Which I don't."

"So do you live here boy?" Asked Red, just trying to pass the time.

"It's none of your business, but yes. Why, do you live here?" He motioned around the little shelter.

"Pretty much. Sometimes when I get bored with the folks 'round here I ride the bus 'cross town if they let me. So where are you headed?"

"Just across town."

Red nodded.

4.

As Jack was walking toward the woods he remembered the countless times that he had spent with his young son hiking and running about the forest. It seemed like the days just ran together when they were out there. The boy had become quite a tracker and could spot a deer before it even knew he was there.

One day Jack and his son had been out hunting. It was the first snow fall of the year. The clouds hung low in the sky and the flakes were so big and light that they just floated silently to the ground. It wasn't quite winter yet so the air was still moist and a bit warm. The smell of the grass and trees still filled the air. Jack's son had spotted some fresh tracks in the snow. They were so fresh that the wet ground hadn't a chance to fill them with water.

Jack looked on with pride as his son instinctively circled around the clearing where there stood an apple tree. He followed along as quietly as he could, but between his excitement and the already half empty flask, it was hard for him to remain inconspicuous. When he finally caught up, the boy was crouched down behind the trunk of the apple tree holding a half-chewed piece of fruit.

"Check it out Dad," he whispered, "It's still warm!"

In a single motion he put his finger to his mouth, turned quietly and pointed to the edge of the clearing. After a long labored stare and a bit of squinting, Jack made out the shape of a huge buck. Of course the expert young tracker had made sure that they were down-wind of the deer so that it wouldn't pick up their scent.

"Jesus," Jack said almost too loudly, "it's a ten pointer!"

"Isn't it beautiful!" Added his son.

At that point Jack began to raise his gun and before the boy could open his mouth the air next to him exploded and he nearly fell over. Ahead of him the giant creature fell to the ground in a cloud of snow. As suddenly as it had begun, it was again silent. Jack's right ear was ringing and his nostrils burned silent. Jack's right ear was ringing and his nostrils burned from the smell of the gun powder. The snow continued to collect all around them. A huge grin of satisfaction lay upon Jack's face but it vanished as soon as he looked at his son's expression.

"So what part of town are ya headed to my boy?"

"What is this fuckin' twenty questions"

"Jus tryin to be polite is all. I don't mean to make a fuss."

Parker wasn't sure if he should say anything at all, but what the hell, he was in the middle of the city at a bus stop talking to a bum. What was there to lose?

"Sorry," he said after glancing down at his watch. "I'm just a bit on edge. When does the next bus come by?"

"Oh she'll swing by sooner or later, sometimes she's behind on Fridays. I'm guessin' that the driver stops for a doughnut or two. Why, are you in some kinda hurry?"

Parker was a little surprised by this question. But then he remembered the war. It had been in the papers. Maybe talking about it would help pass the time.

"Well, kinda. They say that President Johnson is going to start sending even more boys over to that godforsaken jungle and I ain't gonna be one of 'em."

"So, you're a dodger are ya? Cross town my ass!"

Parker twisted his face into confusion for a second, but then decided to go with it. What the hell, it was probably more fun than telling the real story about finally going to visit his father. And besides, this version would probably turn out better.

"I prefer to think that I'm saving my life." He finally added.

Red just sat there and nodded again. This annoyed Parker. It was like the old man knew something but he wasn't saying what it was.

6.

It seemed like about a minute passed after the deer hit the snow before Jack's son finally spoke up.

"What the hell did you do that for?" Stuttered the boy in disbelief.

"Whadda ya mean?"

"Well it's not fair. I mean, you know, I would never shoot one!"

Jack could never understand why his son loved the hunt but not the kill. Where was the big finish? Where was the trophy? What would be left to tell the story about?

"Jesus," he muttered coldly, "I didn't raise a pansy did I?"

The boy just shook his head and headed for home.

"Best one I ever shot." He mumbled. He thought about the spot on his living room wall where he would hang the head of his prize. He would always be able to boast about it when he had company. Another long pull from the liquid heater and the thought was gone.

7.

"Didn't you say you had a wife?" Red gurgled.

"Yes."

"So what about her. You just gonna leave her?"

"Look old man, she took the kids and split long ago so I haven't got shit here. I'm just gonna get my ass up to Sault Ste. Marie and cross the border till this whole thing passed over."

That was a lie. Parker loved his wife and kids more than anything. Hell, if it hadn't been for them, he may have ended up just like his father. It was always a source of friction in the family. His wife could never figure out why he was always trying to work things out with his dad. Maybe help him. He'd come so close to losing her at one point that he just had to give up for a while. It wasn't that she was cold-hearted, not at all. It's just that she always felt like Dad was rude. He'd been pretty mean to her in the beginning.

"I see," said Red, startling Parker, "Why go all the way up to Sault when you can just scoot right over to Windsor from here?"

"You sure are nosey."

"Nothin' better to do."

Parker figured he had a point. What the hell else would this guy be going at 7:00 at night?

"If you must know, I got a buddy up there who won't ask the wrong questions, if you know what I mean."

"Sure, I got ya. Hell, I seen plenty a boys get on this bus and never come back. Some I s'pose got themselves shot tryin' to do the right thing, others they just don't want to come back. Maybe they got buddies up north too."

"Yea, maybe."

"So, why'd the old lady take off on ya anyway?"

"That's kind of a long story. The bus will probably be here soon. I wouldn't have time."

"No matter." Said Red. "What you don't finish I'll just make up for myself. Keeps me occupied."

Parker hoped to hell that the bus would come so that he wouldn't have to finish. It was getting harder and harder to keep up the lie. He mulled over Red's words in his head for a bit. "Tryin' to do the right thing." What did he mean by that, he thought to himself. It bothered him. He almost got up and left. He couldn't do it. He hadn't come this far to turn back now.

Jack's hunt had decayed into a stupor. Nothing around him looked familiar. He had walked these woods a thousand times but now he might as well have been on Mars. The trees looked like one big tangled mass with only the light between them suggesting that there was more than one. He tipped back the flask but was left with nothing but a wet chin. The rest of the whiskey dripped down his shirt.

"Sonofabitch!" He managed to belt out as he threw the flask into the air. A second passed and forgetting that he had thrown it he was startled by the noise of the flask bouncing off a nearby tree. He raised his gun up near his shoulder and took a random shot.

"Who is it Goddammit?"

Then Jack heard a voice, or voices. He was certain of it. "I'm not crazy Goddammit. Who is it?"

He turned so quickly that his own force knocked him on his ass. He fumbled with his gun and hauled himself to his feet. He could barely see in front of him and he began to panic. Where were the voices coming from? Were they real? His brain was so clouded with alcohol he couldn't tell the difference. He re-loaded the chamber of his gun and fired again straight up into the air.

Jack's ears were too numb and his brain too slow to make out the voice but he felt like someone, or something was after him. He had gotten disoriented in the past, but this time he was scared to death. He vaguely heard a voice behind him so he wheeled around to see a blue coming toward him. He raised his gun to shoot but for an instant he thought of the deer. CRACK! All Jack saw was a bright flash and then for a few seconds everything was dark and he felt himself hitting the ground. He landed on the side of his head because he wasn't able to get his arms up in time. The side of his face that had been hit felt hot after he pulled it off of the ground and spit out the snow, blood, and dirt.

"Dad...Dad...." he heard. "Jesus dad you almost killed me!"
The last thing Jack saw was the ground just before his face hit it.

9.

A police officer walked by the shelter and nodded at the two men. Parker had been thinking and really didn't notice until he had walked by the entrance.

Red looked back at Parker who was standing near the entrance of the shelter with his hands in his pockets staring down the street.

"What's the matter boy?" He said as he scratched his beard. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"What do you think, man?", he lied. Thinking on his toes.

"Oh come on now, they can't tell a draft dodger just by lookin' at one. Besides, that cop wouldn't have anything to do with that anyway. You ain't tellin' me everything are you?"

"And why the hell should I?" said Parker in an angry voice. "And where the hell is this bus?"

He walked out to the street and looked around. The moon was showing through the clouds casting sort of an eerie pall over the city. He realized that he had almost toned out the noise of the city while he was talking to Red. Everything seemed so huge. For the first time since he left the house he felt alone. He looked at Red and walked back into the shelter.

When he got back in Parker saw Red pulling odds and ends out of his bag and setting them on the ground. There was an old blue comb, a quarter, a couple of pop cans and a dirty Red Wings cap. Finally he pulled out a crumpled up photograph, peeled a piece of gum off the ground and stuck it to the back of the picture. Then he slapped the picture up on the glass wall with a loud thud and pointed at one of the people in the picture.

"That was my wife." he said, before Parker could say anything.

He was shocked. It was weird to think that this guy actually had a past.

"I took off about ten years ago thinking I had the world by the balls. No bitch could hold me down. Well look at me now kid, if that's what you are - a kid. I should have stayed home."

Parker just stared at Red like a deer caught in the headlights. He didn't know what to say. "Jesus," he thought, "what have I gotten myself into?" He looked at the picture again. He saw what Red used to be; what Red's wife used to be. Parker knew that this trip could really screw things up with his wife and kids. Especially since he had just left a note on the table with a phone number and a brief explanation. Not a class A move, but it was the best he could do at the time.

"OK Red, it's like this...." He started to tell him about his Dad and how things had gone bad because of his drinking but his words were drowned out by the loud whine and grumble of a diesel engine. The bus pulled up to the shelter and the two men just stared at each other amidst the hissing and the popping of the buses brakes

The bus doors swung open and Parker looked around to see an impatient bus driver and a few tired passengers. He looked back at Red and the picture on the wall and then back at the bus.

"C'mon asshole." Blurted the bus driver. "This ain't my only stop."

Parker looked down the street towards his house and then back at Red.

"Draft dodger my ass." Said the bum.

Parker slowly climbed onto the bus and in a few seconds it was rumbling down the street. The bus kicked up a bit of a breeze that blew a Coke can into the shelter. The city settled into its regular pattern and hummed a lonely incantation to the sound of horns and voices. Red picked up the Coke can and put it into his bag, leaned back into the corner and fell asleep.

Christopher Lloyd Wood

In My Arms

Come to a place that's warm and inviting
Enveloped in perpetual sunset -- the sun's blush,
Cuddle a baby in soft, fuzzy jammies
With the sweet smell of Springtime in his hair;
Press warm lips against a petal-soft cheek
Drinking in fragrance like nectar,
Hear tiny laughter mixed with yawns --
It fills a yearning soul.
All too soon this too will fade
Like the blush on the face of the sun,
The child will grow leaving longing arms
Wishing for Springtime again.

Susan R. Woodward

STRANGELY POSITIVE

It's not every day that an innocent man receives a death sentence. It's enough to make one think, or stop thinking. Looking at Allen. The sun is on him, making his chest, nipples and face gold. I prop myself up on one arm, naked body slipping over my satin sheets. Always a sucker for luxury. They do make satin lined coffins.

Like a cat or flower, Allen turns his face toward the light. Mumbling softly in his sleep, tiny bubbles of saliva slide across his lips. I brush his lips with mine. Tasting him. Tobacco, alcohol and Pepsodent. I don't wake him.

Hauling myself out of bed I stagger to the bathroom. My head is all fuzzy, clouded with the remnants of a long night. The Lime Light and mutual masturbation, safe sex.

Safe sex. "Ha," I think to myself standing over the john. Morning rituals. My coffee is somewhat bland this morning.

Down West 70th, east on Central Park South, crossing 5th, Madison and Park. Past FAO Schwartz, Tiffany's and Lord and Taylor's (Meccas in their own right). At Lexington I hop the Upper Midtown Express. Speeding its way under the city, I balance on the train. There's a man with no legs on the train. A smelly old man in a wheelchair. (Mobility impaired passengers utilizing mobility devices or aids should board at the first car of the train only.) I've memorized city lingo. "Brother, can you spare a dime?," or something like that he says to me. He smells like St. Ides and public restrooms. I ignore him. If he doesn't get money from me he won't die. He will get it elsewhere. I used to be ashamed of my own legs when I saw the mobility impaired. Now in an odd sense I am connected to these people. (Well, he lost the use of them, what's the difference?) I cut through Washington Square. With the sun on my neck (summer in the city) I pick my way across the lawn littered with NYU students. "This was me," I think, "only a few years ago." Their energy annoys me. (This in itself perturbs me. Aren't such annoyances reserved for the very old? Or, for those reserved for old age?) I continue to be annoyed. Down West Houston to the corner of Broadway. Ho Ho's on Broadway. Ho Ho, the formidable drag queen trapped in an Armani power suit, himself, is hosting the breakfast shift. "Christopher, darling!" his attentions make my skin crawl, "You're late again." Alas, I am. It is after nine. It had been after nine yesterday, but, it was always after nine. Late or not, there was always time for my pre-work cigarette and scotch at the bar. Where I flirt with Michael the homogeneous bartender. Shameless. "And darling, your cumberbund isn't quite straight." He waddles off. But what is?

Realizing that people were going to order and eat whether I smoked or not. Whether my attire was correct or not. I proceed to the bar. A Marlboro Light, Dewar's and Michael's sculpted clavicles and full lips, accompanied by restaurant music. Drivel.

Lunch break, I head up Broadway, destination: Hoffman's Coffee. Chic. Very. Construction ahead forces me to cross the street. I have to walk by some, hitherto invisible to me, Christian Fellowship Church. There are two signs in the window under a banner that reads "Jesus Loves." "God Hates Fags" and "AIDS Cures Fags." Standing in the epicenter of the civilized world with the sun beating a hole in my head I cringe. It's only a slight cringe. I muse, how in my youth these simple minded platitudes of hate written by simple minded people would have enraged me. Perhaps I would have gleefully chucked a brick through the window or assisted ACT UP in a wild show of civil disobedience.

But, now? It is no matter I realize, almost gleefully, if people make such signs, or are allowed to. It's no matter really even if people make signs proclaiming equal rights; or if anyone ever marches again like the valiant souls in D.C. Pride and existence need no allowance or permission. It is no matter. I will always be gay. And proud.

I realize this as I hold my head up high and go on my way. As the virus continues to eat me from the inside out.

I buy the Times. Bad news. Like that lethal envelope from GMHC. (And that envelope had been free.) I ponder my spare change before tossing it into the vendor's tin. Coffee at Hoffman's. Something in me wants to read the funnies. (I flip to the obituaries.) The daily Butcher's Bill of pandemic. It's easy to see them, to hear them, behind the print. The lesioned bodies, the hacking coughs. John Merrick knew more of that thing called respect. (If you do not know who that is count yourself lucky, no sympathy need be wasted.) So and so: passed on after a long illness, survived by: long-time companion, partner, close friend... Blah. Blah. Blah. (Sticks and stones.)

Christopher Wade Ketchum; died of AIDS, A-I-D-S. Survived by his lover, L-O-V-E-R, Allen Mitchell Stevens. (But words can kill me. Shattering, like a brick through a plate glass window.) Scratching my neck (tender skin) and lighting a cigarette I wade back through the city. Back to Ho Ho's.

An after work detour. Back on the Lexington Express. Memories are on my mind. My mother used to tell me to watch the stars. "Watch, even listen," she'd say, "stars are the souls of those you loved." No wonder there are so many stars. Off at East 43rd. A girl catches my eye. She's smiling to herself. Not a crazy smile, just a smile. This girl with her violet sweatshirt reminds me of youth. My youth. Life mattered then (not just an agonizing mean to a frightening end). Friends mattered then. But now? (I can't touch, shouldn't touch. Harmful.) What does it matter? It doesn't. There's no time. I never thought I'd live forever. My life, after all, is kind of like a decoration now. Yep, that's me. The big, plastic, decorative, purple pansy. The

slightly askew lawn ornament. The dead flower. Down East 43rd with the sweet forgetfulness of alcohol (the beverage of choice in my life) already on my lips. The Spike. It's where I met Duane. Someone gave me a "Name Your Baby" book once. I can't imagine why. It fascinated me, the book. I would spend hours pouring over the names and their meanings. What did it matter that I was destined never to name my own (or want to)? Allen: origin unsure, perhaps Welsh, meaning: hound. Dog. This too used to fascinate me. A cat lover, myself, I never quite understood: dog. (I understood my cat, though. Poor Angus. He's dead too.) It amused me that allegedly they ate dogs somewhere. It amused me that my mother never ate oriental food. (She never let me, either). Duane: religious origin, meaning: dark, darkness. No kidding. One night in darkness. One mistake in a smelly tearoom. Christopher: origin unsure, meaning: filled with Christ. No. Filled with death perhaps.

Morbid. Too morbid. (Haven't I always been like this? Priests and therapists have always said so. Perhaps I agreed only to shut them up. I've forgotten. What difference does it really make, how I feel?) Entering the modern disco, I mentally kick myself to produce a smile. It's all a game. (Always has been.) Smiles, side-long looks, furtive downward glances. I even catch the outdated, yet strategically placed kerchief and keychain. I suppose simple lust never goes out of style. Drink in hand I navigate my way through a sea of young, tight bodies. The floorboards bounce under my feet. I used to think I should work at maturing my musical palate. A Little Holliday, Flack or Garland (icons in their own right). But, nothing moves me like a good, solid club beat. I'll be over the rainbow soon enough.

I swallow and realize this is pointless. (My blood seems to all go to my face and nowhere else. It's trying to escape through my eyes and mouth - any orifice in a storm). What does it matter?

Meeting new friends, new prospects? Not morbid, this, no. Just reality. Life, after all, has always been indefinite.

I go home under the stars. The stars I already have membership to, early membership. A certain giddiness is in my step. I climb the stairs lightly in my Italian loafers.

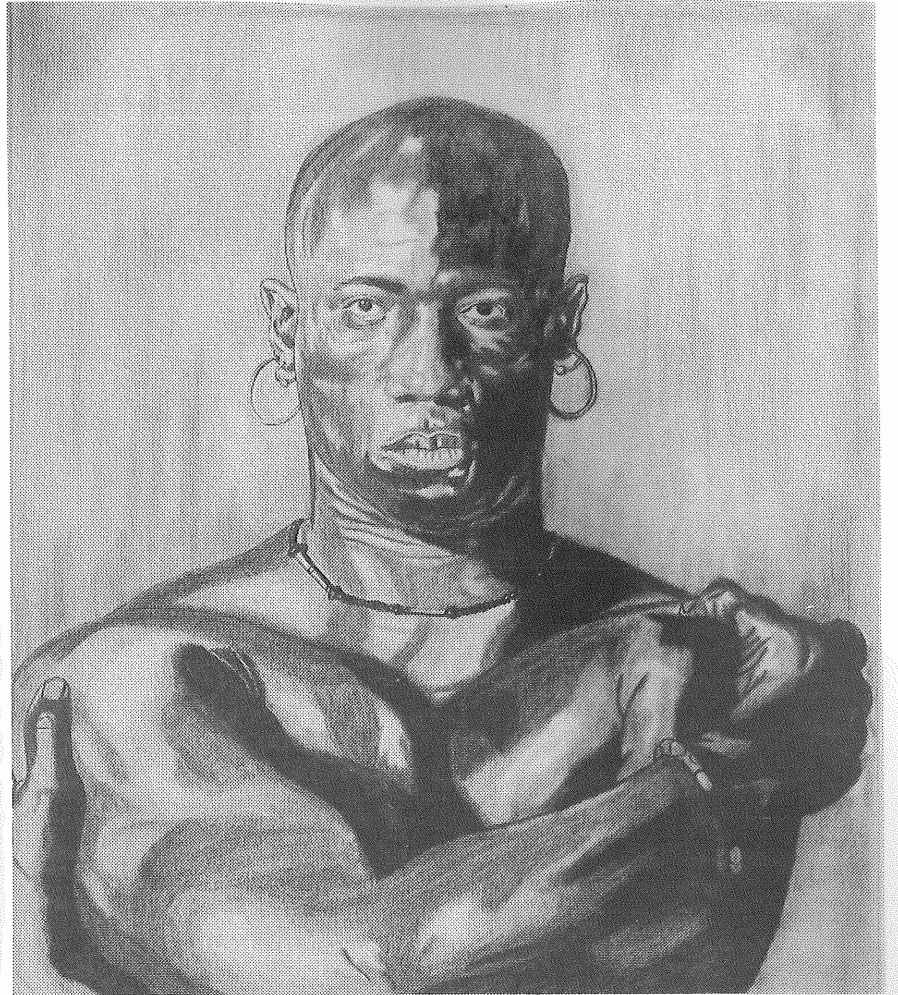
Allen is home and sweetly oblivious as ever. I take his hand, after all, one must touch, should touch. It's been so long.

With a sense of finality that I recognize as actual emotion, I eye the box of trojans in their cool, dry place on the dresser. And realize - that is where they are going to stay. Maybe later I'll blame the heat of passion for my forgetfulness, maybe not. What does it matter?

With Freddy Mercury (or maybe it's The Cure's "Killing An Arab") in my head, "Mama, I just killed a man...." I shut the door behind us. After all, they really do eat dogs somewhere, don't they.

NOTE TO READERS: The previous fictional work was loosely based on THE STRANGER by Albert Camus

Molly Rose Zeigler



*Unfortunately the artist who created the above artwork
(also seen in detail on our cover) didn't leave us his name.*



Mark Kmidowski



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