

Spring 1993

American Goat - 1993

Shannon Thomas

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Thomas, Shannon, "American Goat - 1993" (1993). *American Goat*. 4.
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american goat

NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY **4**

american goat

NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY 4

A Publication of *Apocalypse literary arts coalition*

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Submission Guidelines

American Goat is now soliciting manuscripts for its biannual publication. We are interested in poetry and short fiction. We publish Experimental Fiction, Science Fiction, Erotica, Traditional forms of fiction and poetry, Children's Stories, Romance, etc. Send us your best, most original work.

Submissions must be typed (dot matrix accepted) and double spaced. Margins should be one and one-half inches all the way around. We will accept up to five poems and two short stories per contributor.

In each issue we print contributor's notes. To save correspondence time and paperwork, please enclose a short (150 words max) biography, or a personal statement concerning you and your writing. Bios will not be considered during the selection process.

We also accept submissions of *cover art*: black and white drawings and/or photographs. All cover art submissions must be 5 x 7 or larger.

Please include your name, address and a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you wish us to return unaccepted submissions.

Send to: Editorial Staff
 Apocalypse literary arts coalition
 Northeastern Illinois University
 5500 N. St. Louis Avenue
 Chicago, IL 60625

The Drowning

Out on our lake white buoys
warn boats away.
Two black-hooded heads
split surface silk, emerging from below,
where a quiet swimmer rocks,
softly hammocked in ropy weeds.
The wet-suited divers cling-
black eels-to each side of a boat
that glides toward shore.
On our pier the sheriff
stands with practiced ease
before another event in his day.
An ambulance waits in back.

We dove from that same raft.
But the one who sleeps
went much farther down,
a place we have not been.

The old blue heron
eats its way across sky
with huge gulps of wings.
I watched in dawn's smolder
as the great night-feeders
leapt on flapping tails-red jaws wide-
pulled down dark's last flies.
As the water pulled him down
whom we did not know.
As we are pulled down
from our days' bright blue-
never knowing when
we'll hear the splash,
feel the jaw's closing.

Helen Reed

Sex and Red Hair

i was doing my laundry
when sex and red hair
walked by. her
back arched backward
and her red hair, too.
she wore black tights
with no panties that
showed her sex
and i almost didn't
smile back.
she was washing
her dainties and
fancies, the lace
was a tossed salad in
the wash.
she had no bra
under her spandex
top and i saw
2 dots of sex
almost covered
by red hair.
I said do you have any
dryer sheets?
she said yes. in my room. wanna
come with?
sure i said just let me
get my poetry notebook.
poetry, huh?
yes. i'm a poet i said.
she looked interested,
the sex and red hair. i'd made
it a point to talk about'
poetry. she'd fucked a friend
who'd read her his poetry
and he was no good:

...Roses are Red...
...Let me count the ways...
we got to her room and the
fishes bubbled in the corner
and her sex smell hung on
the air like a man holding
a buildingside with a forefinger
and a fuck you.
just a minute she said and
stood on her little toes to
get the dryer sheets
off a top shelf and
i stared at her
hot sex through the
tights
and watched her
red hair like a Sabatini match-
swaying back and forth and
back and the other way-
and i smelled the
man 'bout to lose
the fuck you and
she said how many do
you want?
i said one. two. three. i don't
care. i'm bummin'.
she laughed with
the sex and red hair.
i want to read your
poetry sometime, 'K?
sure.
the falling man
yelled fuck you.

Jason McVay

Poetry Reading

There are ladies
in navy suits
who leave some some
one says prick in
a room where you
can hear it. It's
45 degrees and
there is only
cold apple juice.
The Indian pulls
a blanket closer.
There is a long
haired pale thin
woman in a rose
flowered dress
pulling her arms
so tight around
her you nearly can
hear a rib crack.
One poet listens
for lines he can
use and jots them
down on a boot heel.
None of the poets
have a watch. The
mic buzzes and splats
like a nest of bees
a giant stamps on.
There is more pain
than apple juice.
The poet who talks
about splitting
wood and seeing his
breath over a

desolate frozen
stream has written
a thirty one part
poem about this.
Someone tries to listen
sniffing patchouli
as if that could
help. The poet
who is building
his body takes off
his clothes and
reads a poem
about how people
prefer wrestling
matches to poetry
readings and for the
first time so far
the audience knows
what he means

Lyn Lifshin

Mausoleum on the Levee

Silt carrying south collects below me,
I am the mausoleum on the levee.

I know the flesh consuming worms
within my sculpted walls,
a behemoth capacity
of worms,
and the quiet lumbering of fluid molecules
sheering chunks from the levee's side.

Though small, I am not without him whole
or without the seasons passing
for he as much raised me
as earth core's shift and grind.

A river serves not the tributary, but the course;
a tomb serves not the mason, but the corpse.

Don A. Hoyt

Honeysuckle

With the windows thrown open,
I think the nursing home across the way
has discarded whole crates of oranges,
inmates demanding ice cream in this heat.
"And to hell with threats of cholesterol!"
I imagine one feisty old guy, working
his cane like a churn in the freezers
of his parents' July 4th picnics.

When I divulge my theory to my wife,
she roars like an amused lioness,
"What a Northern city-boy you are!"
and leads me to the window
to sniff the honeysuckle I've clipped
every year since we've moved here
without the first notion that the aroma
I've taken for the sweetest fruit of Haifa
is this evening-succulent shrub.

We agree the world's a pleasant place
if only for its gift of fragrance.
For a few moments, at least,
my wife's able to forget her students
who have no hope of finding jobs,
especially the brilliant blind woman
living on what little her family can afford
and the tolerance of strangers.

The odor strokes, caresses,
makes us believe in a gentle power-
not to change the world
but letting us live in it-
our senses, every so often, intoxicated.

Robert Cooperman

Aids Poem

You could blame it on the angle of the moon
on someone else's bad karma
or you could blame it on heresay,
or theresay or no say-
no one making us aware enough-
You could remove all the pronouns
make it less personal-
You could blame it on lifestyles or demons
or you could close your eyes and say
you're so glad it isn't you . . .
but this death thing has venom and vengeance
enough to kill us all —

It doesn't really matter how she got it
which minute it became virulent/
pulsed alive / proceeded to grow
Now, Tanya Simmons birth'd a baby
girlchild, she named her Hope
touched to tiny fingertips
as they whisked her away
to neonatal intensive care
where much later we'd inquire
-Is she home-alive-infected too?

Tanya Simmons birth'd a baby
gave her up for adoption
couldn't care for another
going about this slow, slow dance of dying
stone stoic eyes
thick hair plaited back from her face
painting lacquered walls bloodied
metallic lights bloodied
our hands bloodied
her twenty-four year old face

calm moist clay
she said she thought she'd die today-
phoned goodbye/I love you
her five other children
staying temporarily in a homeless shelter-
we force feed blood to exhausted veins
drop by drop by steady drop

You could blame it on our passivity, our acceptance
-that we're not screaming angry
shaking our fists to the eye of it
demanding more research/more money
but it's less discomforting
to focus other directions
deny that it's epidemic
distance ourselves
only names in the newspaper-
an occasional movie star-
someone else's family-
You could blame it on being in the wrong place

at the wrong time
or just being alive
(Hope's tiny hands exploring space) just being alive
barely alive.

Susen James

Harley Davidson Barbie

astride your
hot, she
spreads
her legs
lets leather
ride up each
bump a pre-
view of coming
attractions
her ass against
where you're
hanging on
coming with her
behind her
deep into her
damp dark night

Lyn Lifshin

Image and Reality

Once in El Dorado
 I thought I glimpsed the human spirit
 but it was only an article from City Magazine
 dazzling oars and standing ovations
 we are on a little bobbing yuppie island
 riding the Bermuda Star as far as it will go
 each day is a crazy dimestore trinket
 each night an anthology of rhythm & blues
 a free trip home for runaways
 Paris for Christmas, it
 is the lost generation within me
 collecting dust no more
 o perverse jazz of a New Age, play me:
 I am a Clipper Ship again
 I am young in Mexico and Atlantis
 I am reprogramming my past
 on a canvas of harmony
 buying fruit and pleasure at Mardi Gras
 it is the darker urge to view
 a darkroom of insanity
 my inventory all bandaged
 it is nude November across town
 over the mountains a scholar from Cornell
 stepping back to admire his exhibition
 on damp mornings a slight infection from '73
 revisiting the past at River Road Plantation
 I examine the open houses and midnight moss
 cuts and bruises and slantboard cupboards
 old pine pieces and yards of ribbon
 here is a pantry I lived in
 no view will last forever
 out on the North Shore
 the living is easy for a while
 Crescent City your maidens are euphoric

first you make a roux
 and mix it with your craft
 the mystique of hurting
 and the thud of the long ending
 as merchants of commerce
 escort us to Tinseltown
 to PJ's for coffee and teacake
 exotic rituals where friends
 imagine heaven together
 then some confetti for our hair
 have you listened to the songbird
 lately late at night
 majestic, I think it is
 the cat and the moon
 growing up together until
 carefully chosen today's dance is
 a menagerie of lights and jugglers
 a slow curve into Atlanta's dust
 that Granny spoke about.

Errol Miller

Under the Shock Light

John McNally

There are times, while traveling alone at night, when the road seems to twist to nowhere, and you no longer trust the instinct of faith, that the road will, in fact, continue; or that you, the driver, will have plenty of time to adjust to that gentle curve. I had taken eight Viverins, and already my heart had paused twice. And the cassettes I'd played to keep me awake had begun to slow to a hypnotic warp, the music becoming a peaceful, wavy melody, perfect for lulling me to sleep, to deep beautiful dreams of deep-sea diving with spears.

I took the next exit.

In the parking lot of the truck-stop diner, I killed the car and stepped out into the gasoline-soaked breeze, and I could still feel the motion of the earth, a moment of pure disorientation. It was partly the drive, partly the Valium I'd taken last night, and partly the jolt of a caffeine overdose. But inside the diner, at the counter, I turned the cup up anyway; and the waitress, too pink and white under the fierce lights, filled it over the top and into the saucer.

I ordered the special: eggs and bacon and some orange juice

to cut the buzz.

And then I began to doze away, my head falling limp, chin to chest, which woke me long enough to doze again, head falling limp - until something hit me on the side of my face. A pack of sugar. It was on the floor now, a blue rectangle.

"Hey," he said. "Hey, pal. You got the time?"

There were two truckers at the far end of the counter, plates scraped clean, and the closest of the two was wiggling a pack of Equal.

"The time," he said. "You got the time."

I pointed to the wall, to the oval clock with large black numbers. I sipped my coffee until the food arrived, then I broke all three strips of bacon into tiny pieces and mushed it together with my eggs.

The trucker with the Equal got up, walked over, and sat beside me. His eyes and breath and speech were blurry from drinking, and his friend kept smiling and watching.

"Tell me," he said. "Who taught you to eat?"

I mushed my bacon and eggs harder. I was in no mood. I had taken four Valium last night to ease the pain of my wife's infidelity, a fact I'd just discovered. What could I do? For a month I had suspected the worst, and when the worst finally became undeniable, I sealed my wedding band inside a #10 security envelope, I pinned the envelope to the kitchen table with the dog-and-cat salt-and-pepper shakers, and I packed a suitcase. I tried driving straight through, from Cedar Rapids to New York City, because continuous movement seemed, for the moment, the only therapy for the mania I felt rooting inside my heart and brain. But now, somewhere in Ohio, the basic task of finishing a meal appeared futile, pointless.

"You look familiar," the trucker said.

"I don't think so."

"I don't think so *shit*," he said. "You look familiar. Let me take a good look." I turned to him, and he said, "I know you."

I scraped my plate with the tines of my fork. "Excuse me," I said, "but I'm trying to eat."

He pointed to himself with his thumb and said, "Bob Wilson. Ring a bell?"

The name seemed to float toward me. *Bob Wilson.*

"Think," Bob said. "Remember me?"

"Bob Wilson," I said.

He smiled; and when he smiled, I shut my eyes and said, "Yeah. I do."

"You do, huh?" He moved closer. Our forearms were touching on the counter.

"Eighth grade," I said. "You bit the head off a garter snake."

Bob called to his friend: "Hey. Did you hear that? I bit a snake in half."

Bob's friend waved him away.

"Hell. I knew I knew you," he said. "Can't remember your name, though. Some Kraut name, right?"

"Kauff."

"That's right. Cough. I knew it was Kraut."

"Bob Wilson," I said, nodding, and he laughed and slapped my back.

There are those of grade school who've taken on monumental proportions in memory, those who've jarred you with their violence or beauty, and you can never quite shake them. With Bob, it was the violence I remembered, pure and scary violence, always present. In the first month of eighth grade, Bob had kicked Paul Ruttenberg fifteen times in the pushed Mary Beth Finley off the top of the jungle gym; and stapled Brian Woo's earlobe to the the homeroom bulletin board. It's always disturbing to see people out of context, whether their displacement is time or space, and in this instance, it was both - fourteen years later, over six hundred miles from the blacktop of Buffalo Bill Elementary.

"What do you do?" I asked.

"I drive a truck for Monkey Wards," he said. "What do you do? Wait. Let me guess." He watched my eyes - the blinking, the momentary aversion. He stared as though he could read the nature of my soul. "Banker," he said.

His guess was so close it scared me. "Auditor," I said.

"I'll bet you make a shit-load."

I shrugged. I took a bite of food.

Truckers, I was sure, made more than entry-level auditors, but why should Bob know this? It would only validate the basic truths that he had always believed - that education was worthless, that violence and ignorance were the surest ways to success and financial stability.

Though maybe this was true. He did, after all, make more money than me; and for all those years I had spent sinking myself with student loans and cash advances on my VISA. Bob was working double-time for Montgomery Ward, making it near-impossible for me to ever catch up with him.

"That's my baby right out there," he said. He pointed out the window, and for a moment, I expected to see his child crawling near the gas pumps and air hose. But it was his truck. His rig. His baby.

"I gave it a name," he said. "*Lady Killer*. You married?"

"No," I said, and I curled my ring finger into my palm, hiding the ghost-pale streak of marriage. "And you?" I asked.

"Christ. Could you imagine some broad chasing me with a whip?"

"Not a whip," I said.

Bob pulled a flask of Southern from his back pocket, then trickled the last of it into my coffee. He pulled my cup over and began sipping it, taking what was once mine, not asking.

He sipped and said, "I beat you up once."

"I don't think so."

"No, no," he said. "I'm sure of it. I beat you up once."

"Listen," I said. "It's been what - fourteen, fifteen years since Buffalo Bill? You want to know the truth? All those years are a blur."

Bob turned to his friend. "Hey, Gus. Guess what? I beat this guy up once. And what do you know? Here he is." He squeezed me to him.

"Is that so," Gus said. "Well, then, you better watch your ass, Bob. He may be the vengeful type."

Bob turned back to me, stared me down, his eyes beginning to focus. "Are you the vengeful type?" he asked.

"No," I said, and before I could stop myself, I said, "I'm a pacifist, Bob."

Gus said, "Those are the ones you got to watch out for. Those are the ones that like to shoot you when you're not looking. Where I come from, pacifist means vengeful."

"Where do you come from?" I asked.

"Some little piss-ant shit-hole you never heard of," he said. He turned away and looked nostalgic.

When Bob finished his coffee - my coffee - he stood and said, "Let's call it even. Here. Punch me. Take your best shot."

"Bob," I said. "Honest to God, we never fought."

"No, no," Bob said. "I remember. Now c'mom and punch me. Give me a hard one. Hell, take two good shots."

I stood and found the men's room. I splashed cool water over my face and rubbed my eyes. Next to the mirror was the rusty, beaten condom machine; and on every inch of wall, there was graffiti about times and places to meet, about the size and shape of genitalia, and about the sad and scary life of men in general.

I clicked on the hand dryer, twisting the vent toward my face. It was true: Bob *had* beaten me up. It had begun with a head-lock. It had cut off my breath, and I remembered thinking I might die, strangled by a boy who didn't understand the connection between breath and life. But at the last moment, he let go and pushed me into a barbed-wire fence. Then he forced my head to the ground. With his palms clamped over my ears, he rubbed my nose along a three-inch stretch of concrete.

Fourteen years later, I was married to a woman who preferred another man — his bed; his life. Yesterday, she came home from work, walked to our bedroom, and shut the door. I was on the couch, watching the Gulf War on CNN, SCUDs blazing aimlessly through the night, and when she stepped back into the living room, she

glared at me a moment, then said she'd be home later, she wasn't sure when.

I nodded. I said, "Okay."

The moment she left, I got off the couch, opened the second drawer of her bureau, and dug through socks and panties. For a month, every day, I'd checked that bureau, reassured by the presence of her diaphragm - the beige case, the tube of jelly - and now it was gone. I packed a suitcase.

Less than twenty hours later, I was in Ohio, paying a waitress and scooping mints from a bowl, and when I turned to leave, Bob said, "I always knew you'd show us all up. You were the one with the brains."

"There were others," I said.

"Were there?" Bob asked. "Hell, I didn't pay that much attention."

I nodded.

Bob said, "You brought back some memories, though. Best years of my life."

"Take care," I said.

Bob said, "Pal. I'll take it anyway I can get it." He wiggled his hips and laughed.

Outside, through the plate-glass window, I could see Bob clearly under the shock light of the diner. He lifted both arms, then clasped his fingers behind his head. He held his breath and tightened his gut. Then Gus came over, half-squatted, and punched Bob in the stomach, three times, in quick succession. The cook came out from the kitchen, and he began yelling and pointing, reprimanding a man whose life had been a series of reprimands. What did Bob care? He laughed, shook his head, then began coughing. He doubled over, coughing into his hand, then reached for a wad of napkins. He coughed into the napkins, then stared at what he'd coughed. Blood? Probably. But what did Bob care? He was already laughing again, passing the napkin to Gus. *Look*, he was saying. *Look what I coughed.*

Carefully, I backed my car away, and I waited until I had

driven beyond the restaurant before flipping on my headlights. Then, from the thin road leading to two towns, I merged back onto the highway, where I could continue my fight to stay awake, where I would listen to the warped music coaxing me back to the deep.

Just Before Ovulation

*They suck the blood
of a mammal
so their eggs will develop properly.
Without blood, the females die.*

All night they hunt inside,
cruising like Harrier jets
for warm blood,
landing like dust upon my flesh
to siphon a meal
with hypodermic bites.
The room buzzes
with their spiracular singing.

They stick to the walls
like tiny, cluster bombs —
thin exoskeletons
splattered by a bath towel.

I lie next to you, waiting
for another sortie,
guarding your centerfold innocence,
leaving your sex unemployed.
It puzzles me
that they leave you alone.
How do they know?

Glen Brown

Leaning on a Piano

Picture a smiling husband;
learn how it is at life end for women;
see her pulse ignite clearly;
pass out chocolates and coke to the widow;
eightytwo years projects face lift lovers again;
tired wrinkle bones wait transit point to happiness.

Gender free loss of happiness;
hurries out and hits truck to visit dying husband;
when he laid others, she played the game again;
learned well the rules of sexual magnetic women;
women find freedom in roles of widow;
following fiftyseven married to conflict clearly.

Literally closed in claustrophobia, hers next to his clearly
lingering infinities of side by side happiness;
brain for rent belongs to widow;
friends royally entertained by a piece of husband
always throwing parties to collect women;
the maid saw cash in his pants again.

She says "What else is new? He fucked me over again."
Family wants her out-of-the-way clearly;
typical debacle of older women;
checks in mail stolen from her happiness;
piano holds happy time frame together husband;
drawer on fifteenth floor for a view with widow.

Epitaph to be virgin nurse cook mother whore loving widow;
too feverish to repeat everything she forgets again;
several widows used to wait by the window for that husband
foiled by her sexual victuals again;
coming every night to new positions of happiness;
at the funeral she pontificates food and sexual women.

Flapjack flipping bouncing mattress women;
someone orders fast hors d'oeuvres for fading widow;
a withered claw clutches happiness
repeats it can't be over, again, again;
the party over clearly;
house and pool on market minus husband.

In teenage hebephrenic trance says she will husband again;
she is desirable and desires clearly;
so ends illusions of newly filed husband.

Joan Payne Kinkaid

The Day the River Leaked

Chicago, April 13th, 1992

The river had sprung a leak, bigtime,
 spilled her guts,
 no simple over-running of - banks, here,
 but ripped wide-open inside
 and we're driving due south
 paralleling the flood
 The city in a pause,
 we trail her murky silhouette to hear poetry.
 "So what, we're late, it's only poetry." he says.
 "But what else is there?" I offer.
 & we hear moist nighttime approach/settle in.
 Air fades to grey-green
 smells of fertility
 early-springtime earth

The river laughing out loud
 reenacts what lurks dreamy in our bones
 incredible circulation below her surface
 He presses my palms creating
 disturbance beneath my skin
 like rivers rushing to fill
 forgotten tunnels

-Note that -
 staring too long at whirlpooling rivers -
 bewitches -
 demands you fill hollows -
 you did not know existed -
 The river throbs big as life. . . bigger
 laps at our edges firm & soft
 He's laughing now - inquires
 where it's all going?
 These words arrange to neat melody
 pilgrimage like sacred water upon a page.
 I try to speak the language of the river
 & our arms outstretched
 appear to move like waves.

Susen James

Double Negative

In the anti-world of anti-men
 lives an anti-man like me
 who sings his plaintive anti-song
 over his anti-tree.

Its branches, spreading underfoot,
 are gripped by the solid air,
 but its roots sway gently in the loam
 up in the earth somewhere.

He plucks the strings of his anti-harp
 that is dry from the anti-dew
 and sings of his love for an anti-girl,
 the antithesis of you.

Her concave chest and her ingrown hair
 he longs for, more or less,
 but mostly he longs for her anti-no
 which she always pronounces "Yes."

John Dickson

The Eyes of a Child

The body I am holding gives another heave
and then is still.
My mind isn't empty, as it has been on other occasions
when I have stolen life from unwilling playmates.

"Through the eyes, through the eyes."

I try to squeeze the voices from my brain;
my hands grip tighter, tighter,
until the flesh between them yields,
is now lifeless, but still useful.

I do not see faces in my memory; I recognize voices.
My parents, miserable procreators, join in the chanting;
Now my cretinous tenth-grade teacher
barks the command,
"Try to see it this way!"

My hands, following a routine, drop
the bruised, constricted neck and lift the power saw.
The whine of the spinning blade pushes the voices
to one side of my head.

They speak louder, almost shouting now:
"Try to see the world...!"
"Look at the world through...!"

My hands mechanically push the saw, first through the
neck,
then the skull of my new plaything.

Voices command me, as they always do,
telling me to remove the brains, the
bloody mess inside the still-warm skull.

The sound of insistent instructors
echoes between my ears:
"You *must* see the world through the eyes."

The plumlike eyes burst easily between
my thumb and forefinger, first one,
then the other. The slime that
runs over my hands is consecrating
and feeds me with power, a new vision.

I lift the skull and place it before my hungry eyes,
my eyes that need only one look, one glance to find
the answer, to obey the command.

"Look at the world through the eyes of a child."

The words resound in my skull, in his skull, too.
I see my persecutors: familiar yet immense, meaner,
through these eyes, more berserk than before.

The voices are now fading, blending with
a siren that builds, draws closer.

I slam the empty skull to the floor
and clap my hands to my ears.

The siren has chased away
the chanting and now I hear a wail,
growing, climbing inside my head,
rattling and wrathful, howling at
the lie I've just exploded.

Ros Bjomik

Finals

The sign in her eyes flashes
NO VACANCY -
no room left for any knowledge
left unlearned from last semester.

She is locked outside of sleep
by a big burly man behind a floral-papered counter
guarding racks of keys labeled "pillow,"
"comforter" and "fence-jumping sheep."

She tries to read from the beginning,
but the pages flash faster than the sheep she begged for:
the quadratic equation mixes with semi-colons
in a compound-complex infrastructure
of global economy and the last notes
of a beer commercial.

What happened to the days
when the end of the year brought parties
and pencils from kids with health-food moms?

They checked out with the best friend,
the key to the code of all the notes about "Him,"
the untieable shoelaces
knotted to withstand the rush to summer
and random dates from U.S. History.

Kate Wolicki

Last Call

Winter protests in the end,
flinging an icy storm
of crested diamonds
across April.
Branches of shrubs and trees
hold furled green buds
in every crease,
waiting to uncurl.
Flashing its last display
of needlepoint snow, the
departing season commits
itself to memory.

Joan Plotkin

Betrayals

Harry White

Divorced parents tend to agree more readily. "You're sixteen years old," I announced with fatherly authority. "Your mother and I both feel you can't be sitting in your room all summer listening to music — even if it is Prokofiev."

It worked. You acquired the job that awaits almost every inept adolescent: ushering at the local movie house. Since the dawn of the arc light revealed it to us, usherdom has survived to the present day a lilliputian land peopled with boys unfit for the uniforms they must inhabit at all times, unfortunate youths destined by their occupation to know pity and terror at a premature age: "Excuse me, but these seats were taken."

"Hey, go pick your nose, buddy. We're tryin' to enjoy the film."

"But these girls. . ."

"Get lost, dick face."

"Wait a minute, Ralph. Ain't that Joey Michaels?" The peroxidized blond squints her face at you through the flickering

darkness as if eyeing some kind of automobile accident. "Sure, I knew it. It's Joey Michaels."

"Who?"

"Michaels. The kid from band. The clarinet."

"Well, well, well, what have we here?" the amazed Ralph remarks, while unfolding six feet out of the chair that is not his, the two girls whose cause you've championed have retreated to a dark corner of the last row of seats. He runs his fingers up and down the lapels of your uniform as if getting the feel of a silk suit. "Four eyes is a big man now," he observes, sticking two popcorn larded fingers into the middle of your lenses and ramming the glasses up to the bridge of your nose. "I'm impressed. Keep up the good work."

Hardly have twenty-four hours elapsed and your embarrassment has spread through the neighborhood like skywriting. "Hey, Joey, come on over here," Jim Hanrahan beckons, leaning confidently on his baseball bat. "Frank 'n' me wanna see African Queen. You gonna let us in?"

"Have a heart, fellas. I'll lose my job."

Jim raises his bat and takes a full, hard practice swing. The air swishes, the cyclone fence jangles nervously as the head of the bat crashes against it. "You'll lose your teeth if you don't."

The Patio Cinema lit up the street a few blocks from my apartment, but weeks passed before I found myself at home on a night you worked. It was one of those summer days when the light lingers well into the evening hours and kids scurry like goblins through alleys and passageways, their shouts intruding through every open window in every room, making reading an impertinence. So I shut off the lamp, pocketed my keys, curious to see you at your first job.

I walked unnoticed past teenage boys swaggering with beer cans and cigarettes, the girls eyeing their antics with nervous interest, and I couldn't help feeling that perhaps I was the one out past my bedtime. I was somewhat relieved to see the old couple

leaving the sandwich shop on the corner. The waitress, hair dyed a dirty fire-engine red, stood at the bus stop with her jacket thrown over her uniform. A Puerto Rican man waited beside her. "Probably the busboy," I thought, and mused once more as to who the busboys in Puerto Rico might be. Maybe coolie labor still thrived there.

I walked by the theatre from the wrong side of the street, trying to glimpse into the lobby as I snuck by, but the street traffic intercepted my line of sight. Sixteen - good grief! - twenty-six years ago I cased these same streets in search of the ideal drug store. Slipping, so I thought, unseen inside, I informed the pharmacist: "I want to purchase some prophylactics." I had prepared a brilliant defence of my inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness based on the writings of Jefferson, Paine, and Mill. Certain of rejection I had not rehearsed the possibility of free choice. "Tipped or untipped?" the druggist inquired. He might as well have crammed his fingers down my throat. Not knowing what in hell he was asking me I simply whined that he should give me "whatever's best," and hearing this the rubber baron wiped me out with a box of twenty-four, tipped and lubricated ("Diane, I swear to God, the box was sealed." "Then why are they all sticky wet?").

The cashier in the ticket booth was marking a textbook as I approached and did not notice me when I began to peer into the lobby. The lights dancing on the marquee bounced off the glass so I had to cup my hands and press my face up against the pane . . . The shock came almost instantaneously. I caught sight of you standing at the ready, a dustpan in one hand, a broom in the other. A chill crept up the back of my neck at how easily I discovered you, unmistakably you, stuffed into a maroon jacket one and a half sizes too small, the brass buttons straining from chest to stomach, the cloth creasing at the armpits. No doubt the jacket that belonged to the kid you replaced and the downtown office had yet to send up a new one.

The faded yellow braids that looped over your left shoulder, the maroon piping zigzagging down your pants leg — every feature

conspired to give the appearance of a refugee from a Viennese operetta. I stared at you pilloried in that ill-fitting absurdity and imagined that some angry crowd had somehow encircled you with insults, while I was now forced to watch at the edge of their abuse, utterly helpless to break through with a hand or voice to shield you from all those who would presently compete to make your life miserable. "Please listen to me," she cried in this very theatre over thirty years ago. "You don't know what you're doing. He is not a Commanchee. Don't take him away!" Of course we kids knew even then that her pleas were falling on deaf ears, an entire townful of deaf ears. For once the schoolmarm fell in love with him, the redskin was destined not to survive the closing credits.

I wiped the breath from the glass, and with the knuckles of my left hand knocked five or six times on the pane. Attentive to every corn kernel that might pop into sight, you did not hear me. Maybe you were fending off boredom by humming to yourself, perhaps the "Battle on the Ice" from Alexander Nevsky which you like so much. I lifted the keys from my pocket and tapped the glass lightly but sharply. Your head spun round like you'd been struck with a pebble. I smiled broadly, waved both hands, and danced a jig in the street. "Hiya, hiya, kid," I mouthed in the immortal words of Froggy the Gremlin, words which, though immortal to my generation, seem nevertheless to be passing from our collective cultural consciousness, since no one re-runs *The Buster Brown Show*, or *Crusader Rabbit* for that matter. And so, never having experienced the immortal Froggy or cared much for street dancing, you scowled at me through the glass. Without moving your head, you turned your eyes like angry little arrows toward the man standing by the candy counter in a business suit with a maroon nameplate pinned to his jacket. Your arm stiff at your side, you shooed me away with an annoyed flick of your fingers.

So who can be blamed for this? Granted it was your mother and I who expelled you from your lazy adolescent paradise, but what

else could we do? You had already reached sixteen, and a little taste of death is still the best preparation for the life ahead. It will be by the sweat of your brow from now on, m'boy. It's just that I guess I lost sight of how soon we become dispossessed of childhood - though you'll have to admit that we did trick the gods for a time, made childhood linger like summer light, we did.

O.K. I'll allow that the parent without custody, which is me, gets the good parts. Mother plays the basso continuo, a daily routine of nagging you to finish your homework, clean up your room and comb your hair, while Dad gets the good parts, arriving on weekends like a fairy granting wishes: ball games and movies and pizzas with everything on them - except anchovies. No one ever wants anchovies! Not even a kid who can sit through the music of Stockhausen will suffer his pizza to be damaged by anchovies (another one of life's mysterious truths). In time concerts and plays and moo shoo pork. Vacations to Disney World, Yosemite, and Boston: "Would I lie to you? This is the place where they threw the tea into the harbor. How is it you believe your teacher and not your father?"

"Fishing?" I cried. "Who put that idea into his head?"

"Don't start with me, Joe. You don't want to take him fishing, you tell him yourself and leave me out of it."

"Here, I found a minnow on the pier," you exclaimed before I could hook another live one from the bucket you'd been playing with.

"David, that is not a minnow, it's a mess. Throw it away. There are still plenty left in the bucket."

But you insisted and carefully strung a few useless scraps of fin and gut onto the hook. "What happens to the minnows we don't fish with?" you asked as I cast the string of mashed minnow guts into the lake.

"Well, we could give them to some other fisherman, or else we can just throw them back in the lake."

"What happens then?"

"Nothing happens. They'll swim away."

You sat, reflecting a moment, beside your bucket of friends before announcing, "I don't want to fish anymore. I'm tired. Let's go

home."

A few minutes later we stood watching the silver waterfall of minnows gush into the lake, the spray vanishing to reveal little gray lines of fish scurrying every which way under the surface. "Say goodbye to the minnows."

"Don't be silly, Dad. Minnows can't hear."

"For a five year old, you think you know everything, don't you?"

"Wait a minute, fella. Let's get this straight once and for all. I never promised to take you to London, and I am not taking Pamela. Pamela takes herself. As a matter of fact, though it's really none of your business, it's a lot cheaper when two people can split the cost. Why don't you get your mother to take you somewhere this summer? She's capable."

You screamed, "You betrayed me," when mother and I told you we would be separating. "Where does a four year old learn to talk like that?" I wondered aloud after you'd slammed us out of your room.

Mother reminded me that you'd always been precocious. "I guess he'll have to learn a lot faster now," she added.

But as I ponder your accusation, sitting in my room now, my windbreaker unzipped, keys wet in my palm — you'll pardon me if I don't turn on the light just yet — I realize that it is you who have betrayed us, you with your Prokofiev and Stockhausen and now with uniform and dustpan and the wave of a hand stern as an usher's cap. I had stories yet to tell, places to take you while still your eyes were young with wonder. But from here on out you will be the man with responsibilities and I the silly kid knocking on the glass to recover the attention of a lost child.

"So what can I do for him now?" I wondered as I strolled about the neighborhood tonight, even, I am ashamed to say, past the townhouse we all lived in those first four years. And I recalled how my mother used to nag me to distraction with that question. Till the day she died, she never stopped: "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No, Ma, there's nothing," I would repeat, which was the truth and the reason why I shouldn't have said it to her. After a time one

inevitably looks no longer to parents, but to friends and lovers for comfort, and even the best of lovers haven't the talent to soothe all one's pains. So one morning, sick at heart from having shouted nothing a bit too emphatically over the phone the night before, I gathered all the laundry I could and dropped it at her house on the way to work. Standing already thirty minutes late in her doorway, clutching a sheet-full of dirty underwear, I asked once more, "Ma, why don't you do for yourself once and a while?" She shrugged her shoulders. "Go talk to the wind," I thought and gave her my laundry and a timid hug, saying as I did that chicken would be all right for dinner that evening.

It is a painful realization, but a true one - since pain never lies to us - that there is not much I really can do for you now. Nevertheless, sitting in the dark, with only myself to hear, I hereby promise to shake your hand vigorously whenever we meet and refrain from mentioning silly things like how one summer morning, when the whales were being harpooned to extinction, you struggled to save the minnows and made me wish at that moment that you and me and the sun could stand still forever.

Ah well, as we all know, it did not happen. So maybe the time has come for me to concentrate on Pamela. I have the money now, and what would be so wrong if I did take her to Rome? She's played second fiddle to Disney World and Yosemite for years now. In part I'll take her in the hope that when a parent's final betrayal comes upon you, you will be able to smile softly to friends that have gathered to comfort you, and you will say to them, "The old guy certainly knew how to enjoy himself!" Maybe by then you will have forgotten that on a summer evening about a generation before, the future old guy came knocking and you, through no real fault of your own, scowled through the glass and said, "Sorry, we're closed. I am not permitted to let anyone in at this time. It's policy." I, of course, could have pointed to the lights that were still dancing brightly above me. But what would have been the point? It has ever been thus - for me, for my mother before me and one day for you. Prepare yourself, fella. You may not have known it, but it all began tonight.

White Stained Wood

i dropped out of the room
 for a bit of writing
 and returned with marlboro man burning
 off my lips.
 my friends said nothing
 but stared and moved to the
 right
 side of the room.
 just tell me i wanted to say.
 it's just a lung sac or 2
 you won't even feel it i wanted to say.
 but they'd left me on the
 left
 side of the room
 ostracized, just
 my marlboro man to keep
 me company, pass his words
 through my lips. but
 he would die soon
 when i drowned him in
 beer anyway
 so i left to spend
 time with my pen
 and my paper and i
 stained this
 poem.

Jason McVay

She Can't Escape

Drone and percussions
 pale against where she wants
 to be
 trivial pursuits and lasagne
 he loads her pure bourbon
 sprawled on top too hot
 contra tenored in whipped eggs
 inside the other's id
 goes retrograde
 strange pose-tableau vivant
 as their universe
 of feint pulsations
 in mouth of grated cheese
 knees in triple bi-pass
 and spilled kyries
 from her arms and onions
 the quick laugh pain gasp
 of gender sequence
 revelations of using
 someone's body.

Joan Payne Kincaid

Not Quite a Sonnet on the Divisibility
of Kinetics and Infinite Bisection
or a Theory of Yardwork

I can not help musing as the ancient
 philosophers, such indolent meta-
 physicians with nothing to do all day:
 hulking Heraclitus with both feet sub-
 merged in the same river, soaking bunions
 in a flux to prove his Logos; drunken
 Zeno, denying motion by proving
 nondivisibility in goblets
 of wine. All this while there's work to be done:
 the grass needs mowing, the viburnum needs
 pruning. No doubts about this collision
 of leaf and blade. I think I'll leave the lawn
 half-cut, the bushes half-trimmed and venture
 upon this dialectic in my yard.

Glen Brown

The Hereford Bull

Even from a quarter-mile away
it's huge as a locomotive,
tiny eyes somehow spotting us
as we hike down this mountain trail
and suddenly whisper and sidle off
into the long grass, keeping
a small stream and a hundred yards
between us and that living boulder.

It lowers that monster head and feeds-
a crunching of iron nails
while we round a bend and run
as if a herd were snorting
against our churning buttocks.

Then it's safe to walk again,
to make up stories of that bull:
its unearthing the mountain ground
with pawing hooves
like strip-mining equipment
big enough to use on Jupiter.

Robert Cooperman

Barbie Joins the Moscow Circus

is tired of always
being sleek and
pretty, doesn't
expect it to take
as long, she's
never had to work
so hard, do ballet,
juggling. When she
jumps on parallel
bars and the trapeze
wire she's not very
flexible, crashes
breaks a finger,
and toe and tho the
sequins are different,
she doesn't under-
stand why no bears
sniff *her* crotch,
no hairs flare out
over a too perfect
body that the lion
tamer and tattooed
man with their sexy
warm butts seem to
find cold, curves
that would bruise
not engulf them

Lyn Lifshin

Leaving This Woman To Speak In Poem

There are at least two sides to every story,
 intricate perspectives & dialect
 inflections worn like shadow
 from past-life suns-
 There was this magic between us,
 this man and I,
 my desiring of him,
 not at all polite.
 Skin hungering for a lover
 body boundaries blurred,
 mindscapes curved to linear/
 paralleling / singing out.

He would tell it differently,
 this season elapsing first word to last,
 deep-freezing it bareboned on paper,
 computer-typed flat and lifeless,
 forfeiting the music in the incantation,
 forgetting the magic.

Then there's reality,
 glimpsed from the corner of an eye,
 elucidating-
 like sudden soundless lightning
 slashes-
 over a night-black lake
 & betrayal tasting to the tongue
 like frozen metal
 betrayal absorbing through
 to disbelieving bones
 & him explaining at 50-miles-a-minute
 superficially meaning every word.
 Leaving this woman to speak in poem
 to summon hibernation,
 thick white snowcovers,
 healing through her words.

Susen James

Compass Points and Lancaster

Where did I drive?
 Has it become automatic
 That I cannot remember what I did?

A look back to relieve my distress
 I saw

Individual units of power
 Moving
 Lights bolted in the sky
 On the road
 Blackened strips
 Used Cigarettes
 Small cement walls
 And even move immobile units blocking my view.

Where was I driving?
 It has become automatic.
 The compass points north
 There,
 Grovers Mill, New Jersey
 South,
 Oakridge Weapons Factory
 West,
 Andreas' Fault
 East,
 Lancaster street
 That is where I'm driving.

I looked back and remembered I had seen Lancaster.

James C. Butler

Uncle Sam and Victoria's Secret

There was a time when the United States
was the brassiere of the world.
We held everyone firmly together.
The "American Dream"
was the underwire
that hoisted-up freedom and democracy.

Now the world has had a mastectomy.
The Implant Empire has deflated;
freedom is spreading like silicone,
and the world is bouncing along
without us.

Kate Wolicki

Operating Procedure

We are wakened at dawn
and taxied down the
hospital corridor.

Only to wait our turn like
airplanes, lined up
in a holding pattern.

Nurses, chattering nearby,
stop to see if our seat-
belts are fastened.

Feeling light-headed, I am
reconciled to the rest
of the journey.

Motors revved, our cots
spring forward. Is this
adrenaline propulsion?

The surgeon has the blank
look of a pilot
entering the cockpit.

He pulls on his gloves.
"Arrivals and Departures,"
a well-kept secret.

Gertrude Ruben

Spades

M. B. Baken

Mitchell says that God says that he will beat me at cards. I tell Mitchell I seriously doubt God is involved in this game, and if He is, I doubt He has much faith that either one of us will ever win. Mitchell laughs.

Mitchell and I are seated across from each other at my dining room table. We're playing for the title of World's Champion Spades Player. We've played for World's Championship before, and we will play again. The truth of the matter is, neither one of us ever really does win. We play to make the night time pass and we play because we know that if we try to concentrate on something we will be able to drink longer and more. We've already drunk a lot and we are doing fine.

We're seated at my dining room table which I recently finished painting. It's grey, with blue specks, black ticks, yellow bees, and pink swirls around the edges. Mitchell thinks the table is

cool, which is unusual for Mitchell. Normally, Mitchell would have reminded me that art sucks, as does everything else in this world. Mitchell is the the godfather of meaninglessness.

I start to shuffle the cards while Mitchell goes to take a piss. All of a sudden it occurs to me that Mitchell is a very big man. Mitchell's father is also a big man, but Mitchell's father is fat. Mitchell isn't necessarily fat. Mitchell is big like a bouncer.

I deal the cards and Mitchell puts on Les Rita Mitsouko. Mitchell and I like music by women who are hard core. Mitchell likes me because he thinks I'm hard core. He thinks I'm just one of the guys. Les Rita Mitsouko sings "I've loved every man but I'm stupid anyway."

Mitchell starts acting like he has the greatest hand in the world and that it would only be fair to me if I re-dealt the cards. I tell Mitchell to shut up and play. I take a drink of my scotch and water and I light one of my few remaining cigarettes. We're drinking scotch and water because we've already drunk all of the beer and wine. Mitchell lays down his card and I take the trick. I smile at him. Big deal, Mitchell says.

Mitchell lights one of his few remaining cigarettes. Mitchell smokes Mores which are long and thin and black. They look sophisticated between the fingers of Mitchell's very big hands. I'm just trying to let you get a few tricks so you don't feel totally stupid when I take the entire hand, Mitchell says. I have only one heart and the rest of my hand is spades. Mitchell has all the high cards but I have all of the spades. I am going to whoop Mitchell's butt.

Les Rita Mitsouko sings "Tonight you just wanna go to my house, you just wanna go to my bed, and I don't care." Mitchell and I pause for a moment to listen to Les Rita. We like this song. We like the way Les Rita whistles in the middle as if she really doesn't care. For a moment we both feel as if we don't really care. For a moment it feels wonderful to be drunk and to feel as if nothing really matters.

When the song is over I throw down my only heart and Mitchell takes the trick. Ha, Mitchell says. He throws down the ace

of hearts but I take the trick with the two of spades. Fuck you, Mitchell says. I'm not letting you deal anymore, he says. I laugh. Mitchell takes a drink of his scotch and water.

I take the hand and the next three hands after that one. Mitchell is fed up with spades. We're completely out of liquor and I just lit the last cigarette in the house.

We'll have to drive to the East Side, I say. Mitchell reaches into his pocket and starts counting his money. Together we have twelve dollars. Just enough for two six packs and two packs of cigarettes.

I turn off the stereo and the lights and put on my coat and try to concentrate on being sober enough to drive. Mitchell is sitting on the couch pretending like my Mr. Potato Head and my super-cool-hot-pink-plastic-waterbug are having a conversation. So, what do you think? Mr. Potato Head says to the super-cool-hot-pink-plastic-waterbug. Scotch and water, the super-cool-hot-pink-plastic-waterbug seductively says to Mr. Potato Head. C'mon, c'mon, Mitchell says. I head for the door. C'mon, c'mon, I say to Mitchell. Mitchell lifts his big body off the couch.

As I pull onto the highway I'm surprised by how sober I really do feel. Mitchell plays with the radio but there's nothing good on so I push his hand away and leave the dial on jazz. Mitchell starts digging through my glove compartment. Don't you have any spare cigarettes in here, he asks. I don't know, I say, but keep looking. Mitchell starts putting the contents of my glove compartment on his lap. What's on this tape, he asks. Cool, I say. He slips the tape into the cassette. Public Image Limited. This Is Not A Love Song. Cool, Mitchell says. He continues to look through the glove compartment. Aha, Mitchell says, pulling out a dry and broken cigarette. He throws the butt in the ashtray and lights the cigarette. After Mitchell takes a few drags, I say Mitchell give me a hit. Mine, mine, mine, Mitchell says.

Take this exit, Mitchell says. I pull off the highway. The East Side looks dead and flat and empty. I'm beginning to worry that

nothing will be open. We drive down Main Street. Mitchell, I say, I have to take a piss. Jeez, Mitchell says. We see a gas station up ahead that seems to have its lights on. Pull in there, Mitchell says.

Ask them if I can use the bathroom, I say to Mitchell as he gets out of the car. I watch Mitchell as he talks to the guy at the gas station. Mitchell has thick, curly black hair. He has a long tail that hangs down the middle of his back.

No bathroom, Mitchell says as he gets back into the car. He puts the two six packs on the floor in the back and the two packs of cigarettes in the breast pockets of his army jacket. Shit, I say. Mitchell opens a beer but doesn't offer me one. I don't ask for one because I have to piss really bad and because I'm not feeling as sober as I did when we first started out. Just go down the road a ways and go behind a tree, Mitchell says. Mitchell, I say, this is East St. Louis and I'm not going to willingly go behind some tree in the middle of the night and pull my pants down. Jeez, Mitchell says.

We drive down the road and finally see a bar with lots of cars parked out front. You can piss in there, Mitchell says. I pull into the parking lot. There are several police cars with their lights on parked around the building. This is both comforting and frightening to me. If I don't come back out, I say to Mitchell, just remember that I am the Spades Champion of the World.

I walk into the bar and try not to look at anyone or anything except for a sign that says "Ladies" or "Restrooms." I see a cigarette machine and assume that the bathrooms are that way. All of a sudden I'm surprised by how difficult it is to walk but can't decide if this is because I'm nervous or drunk or both. I keep my eyes focused on the cigarette machine and try to act normal.

The bathroom is crowded with sleazy looking women who are putting more makeup onto their already made up faces. I try not to look at any of them and patiently wait in line. You lost or something, one of the women says to me. The other women start laughing. The woman doesn't turn around to speak to me. She stares at me through the mirror. I just have to take a piss, I say. I look down at the floor and notice that the woman's feet are crammed into

a pair of very high heels. I wonder how she can stand to walk in them, and consider asking her, but decide it probably wouldn't be a good idea. Well you better be telling the truth, the woman says to me. She points her lipstick at the mirror, or at me, and says, we don't need any of you young bitches coming down here and stealing our business. I just have to take a piss, I say again. The other women continue laughing at me and some of them make noises like ooooo, and uh huh. Finally I get a stall and piss. As I leave the bathroom I look into the mirror at the woman. She stares back at me and seductively licks her bright red lips.

Before I leave the bar I take a quick glance into the thick of it. Mitchell has sent me to a striptease joint. There are lots of naked and half dressed women on the floor and on the stage at the far end of the bar.

Mitchell, I say as I get back into the car. Mitchell is laughing hysterically. I carefully pull out of the parking lot and back onto the highway. You better check your rear view mirror to make sure the police aren't following us, Mitchell says. The rear view mirror is directed toward Mitchell. I readjust it. I had to make sure you came back out, Mitchell says. I mean, I couldn't let you die thinking you were the World's Champion Spades Player, he says. I smile at him.

There's the arch, I say to Mitchell as we cross the river. It is huge, massive, and beautiful. Let's go sit by the river under the arch, Mitchell says. I pull off the highway and drive along the floodwall. I finally park on the cobblestones near the river. Mitchell and I get out of the car. Mitchell starts walking toward the arch. He starts climbing the steep stairs and for a moment I stand at the bottom and watch his huge figure. In front of him the arch stands towering and firm. In the distance the few remaining lights of the city glisten and shine on the huge steel structure. The closer Mitchell gets the smaller he seems. He turns around. C'mon, he says to me. I start climbing the stairs. Mitchell is leaning against the left leg on the inside of the arc, staring upward at the amazing curve. I walk toward him. You have to stand on the other side for it to work,

he says. I walk over to the right leg and stand exactly as Mitchell is standing. We both stare upward. The night is windy and cool but not cold. The sky, this close to the river, is filled with stars. I stare upward and think about my father who is an architect. I try to understand what kind of a person it takes to create such a structure. I remember seeing the film about the making of the arch and I think about all the lives that were at risk in trying to secure the final link. I think that architects more than any other type of artist try to imitate God. I think that architects try to defy God. They try to defy probability.

I look over at Mitchell but he isn't there. Mitchell is sitting on the stairs rubbing his knee. I walk over and sit down next to him. He reaches into his coat pocket and hands me a beer. My knee is all fucked up, Mitchell says. He puts my hand on his knee which is very swollen. Gross, I say. It's been like this ever since the last time we got together to play spades, Mitchell says. Shit, Mitchell, I say, that was about a month ago. I know, he says, I don't remember what the fuck I did to it. I open my beer and take a drink. You should go to a doctor, I say. I look through my pockets for a cigarette. Right, Mitchell says, like I can afford to pay a doctor's bill. He takes another beer out of his coat pocket and opens it. Give me a cigarette, I say. Mitchell lights a cigarette and hands it to me. He leans back on the stairs and rests his beer on his stomach. Thank God I don't have to work this morning, he says, the day of rest.

Mitchell works in his father's bakery. Mitchell and his father don't get along very well, just like me and my father don't get along very well. At the bakery, Mitchell's father is always telling Mitchell that he is worthless, a fuck up, and a loser. One time Mitchell's father even fired Mitchell because instead of decorating a wedding cake the way Mitchell's father had taught him to, Mitchell made what he called a "punk wedding cake." He splattered several colors of icing all over each layer and then stuck a leaning cross made out of chocolate covered pretzels in the center.

My father hardly ever says anything to me. I'm always trying to reassemble the few facts that I know about my father,

hoping that sooner or later they will make up a whole. I think that if I could understand my father as a whole then I could understand what it is that my father doesn't like about me.

Mitchell says he doesn't give a fuck why his father hates him. You're just wasting your time worrying about it, Mitchell always says. A spade's a spade, he always says.

I smoke my cigarette and look out across the river at the East Side and then at the river itself. It is wide and fast. It is a known fact that beneath the surface of the river there are tiny whirlpools that can suck you down and drown you. When I was a kid, I used to just stand and stare at the surface of the water, looking for signs of these tiny whirlpools. I used to think that if I could just see one of them, I could make it go away.

Maybe we should go for a swim, Mitchell says. Right, I say to Mitchell. Mitchell stands up and starts walking down the stairs towards the river. I stay seated and drink my beer. I'm not worried that Mitchell will actually try to go swimming. Mitchell is too big to be a swimmer. The river is too fast. I, on the other hand, used to be a great swimmer. I used to be a diver. I remember standing up on a cliff with my father when I was about seven years old. Either you dive by yourself or I throw you off the cliff, my father said to me. I didn't say anything. I stood on the edge of the cliff looking down. I tried to act as if I was ready to dive but I couldn't make my legs move. My father grabbed the back of my neck and pushed me head first off the cliff.

I stand up and start walking toward the car to get another beer. I throw my empty into the back seat. The beers are still cold. I take a long drink and again I'm surprised by how sober I feel. I start searching through my pockets for a cigarette. I remember that Mitchell still has all the cigarettes. Give me a cigarette, I yell to Mitchell but I don't see him anywhere. I look up and down the cobblestones but I still don't see him. I stare at the river. The night is quiet. The river is quiet. I look to my left, my right, and behind me but I still don't see Mitchell anywhere. I walk to the car to see if Mitchell is passed out in the car. I walk back over to the river. The

current is fast. I don't know what to do. It just isn't possible that Mitchell actually tried to go swimming in the Mississippi. I think I hear something to the left of me so I start walking that way saying Mitchell, Mitchell, Mitchell, as I walk. I walk about fifty feet but I don't see anything and I'm too afraid to walk too far away from the car so I turn around and walk back toward the river. I don't really believe that Mitchell is drowning in the Mississippi but I keep staring at the river as if any minute now I'm going to see Mitchell's body floating downstream. Mitchell, I say, but not very loudly. I look up and down the cobblestones again but Mitchell is nowhere in sight. I have no idea what to do. I think about how much time it would take for one of those tiny whirlpools to suck Mitchell's big body down and I think about how much time has already passed. I start to take off my shoes and my socks. I start to unbutton my pants but then I stop and button them back up because I don't know what the fuck I'm doing. I stand there barefoot staring at the surface of the river waiting to see Mitchell's body floating downstream. I think I see something but then I think it's a stick. Mitchell, I yell to the object, just in case. Jesus Christ, Mitchell, I say to myself. I start to walk into the river. The water barely covers my feet. the water is freezing cold. Mitchell, I say, and then a little bit louder I say it again. I still don't know what I'm doing. I'm thinking about the tiny whirlpools. I'm thinking about the fact that the river is too big and too fast and that there's nothing I can do. I take a few more steps into the water. Now it's up to my ankles. I imagine having to deal with the police. I imagine having to drive home alone, having to drive up to Mitchell's parents' house, having to knock on the door, having to tell Mitchell's father that his son has drowned in the Mississippi. I keep walking into the river. The water is up to my knees and my feet are stuck in the mud. I think about leeches, and glass, and sharp pieces of metal but I keep walking into the water. It's up to my waist and the current is pulling me down and I'm finding it hard to stand up. The mud is up to my knees. No, Mitchell, I say to myself. This just can't be happening, I keep repeating to myself. Mitchell, I yell, as loud as I can, almost hysterically.

What the fuck are you doing, you drunken idiot, Mitchell yells at me. I look down the cobblestones and see Mitchell in the distance running toward me. His run is clumsy and somewhat frantic but he's smiling and laughing at me. For a moment I just stand there and stare at his big body moving toward me. He puts out his hand and I pull my feet out of the mud. I get out of the water. You asshole, I yell to Mitchell. You fucking asshole, I say again. Mitchell is laughing. I thought you were fucking drowning in the Mississippi, I yell at Mitchell. My clothes are soaking wet and I'm shivering. Mitchell pulls me toward him and hugs me. You stupid idiot, Mitchell says, I don't even know how to swim.

On the drive home I blast the heater. My pants are soaked and they're sticking to my legs. The sun is beginning to come up. Mitchell is snickering in the passenger seat and now I'm laughing too. Mitchell flips the cassette. You fucking weasel, I say to Mitchell. Do you want another beer? Mitchell asks, handing me a lit cigarette. Mitchell opens his window. It's fucking hot as hell in here, he says. The wind blows his curly black hair. I'm freezing, I say. I turn up the music and stick my hand in Mitchell's hair. I'm feeling good and I don't feel drunk or tired at all.

When we get home I take a hot shower and change my clothes. Mitchell sits down on the couch and starts playing with Mr. Potato Head and the super-cool-hot-pink-plastic-waterbug again. So, Mr. Potato Head says to the super-cool-hot-pink-plastic-waterbug, have you ever gone swimming in the Mississippi? Well, no, the super-cool-hot-pink-plastic-waterbug seductively says to Mr. Potato Head, but I'd let you send me downstream anytime, honey pie.

There are only two more beers left, I say to Mitchell, as I hand him one and open the other for myself. Then I guess it's time for bed, Mitchell says. I sit down on the couch next to Mitchell and Mitchell lays his head on my lap. I can't believe I actually walked into the Mississippi, I say. No shit, Mitchell says. Lot's of people piss in there, he says. No shit, I say, I only did it to save your life.

You could never save my life, Mitchell says. And then he says, I can't even save my own Goddamn life.

Mitchell falls asleep and I slide out from beneath him. I gently lay his head on a pillow. I go to my bedroom and get a blanket and cover him up. I want him to be awake but I know he's drunk and tired and that it would be shitty of me to make him stay up. I lean on the window sill and stare out at the morning. The sun is fully risen now and for a while I watch my neighbors as they go off to work, or church, or wherever they go. I notice the cards all over the dining room table and I sit down and start playing with them. I separate the spades from the rest of the deck and then, one by one, I lay the spades down in a nice neat line. I rest my elbow on the table and sigh and think about doing a painting of Mitchell and me standing by the Mississippi tossing the spades downstream.

Superstar

"King of Pop, Rock and Soul",
created to fill our need
for heroes. A slight figure

in white, his face a mask,
eyes pencilled in Kohl and
sadness. Hesitant as a mime

speaking his first words,
he tells us he was never a
child. Missed the fun

of parties, toys. Christmas.
He's not, as some think,
obsessed with children

and animals, but envies
their innocence. Adores his
mother. Forgives his father

for calling him, "ugly".
Explaining the reinvented
face? He kisses his sister

onstage. They hold hands
like the Twins in Gemini.
A happy penitent, after

confession, he races
past press and paparozzi.
Finds shelter in a limo

speeding the Freeway
to his estate, ablaze with
carousel, Fellini ferris-wheel,

revolving, revolving.

For Brian Descending the Freight Tunnel to Check on the Flooding

Men stand around a manhole
looking down.

You wear a yellow helmet,
a yellow, rubber jacket,
Levis, boots, a smile.

Implements of the contest
hang from your belt-
meters, flashlights,
tools in leather.

You look at me,
then look down.

I get a lump in my throat
whenever beauty
goes underground.

Robert Klein Engler

The Kidnapped Poem

Help!
He's gone!
His crib is empty!
There are ladder marks on the window ledge
and mud tracks on the rug.
Who could have done such a terrible thing?
Issue a bulletin right away -
he needs a special formula
and requires constant care.
Oh, what a beautiful one -
his sense of rhythm already apparent
his little imageries seem so perfect,
and such beautiful iambic feet.

The maid!
I really suspect the maid!
She's been acting very unusual lately,
speaking almost in whispers over the phone
and loitering by the gate with a strange man.
Oh, she's in on it, all right.
But be sure to leave a light in the window.
And a reward - offer a substantial reward.
No questions asked.
Oh, this is terrible -
I'll be searching poem faces forever.

John Dickson

The First Time

I could read the headlines in her eyes
like pornography.

I picked her up
and brought her back to my house.

Discussion was dry;
my palms were wet.

We entered through the scent
of her perfume.

I worked her bra like a puzzle,
her jeans like a linear equation.

Hot breath on a wet hearth.
I was trembling, scared.

The earth, rain and fire
didn't pour down on us,

only the innocent darkness
and the sound of a click.

The dog barked;
the door opened.

Kurt Schuett

My Mother's Autograph Book From 1926

Most of the names
scribbled with
"Roses are Red"
or a "do not forget"
or a laughing "x =
girl, y=boy Z= chaperon
X + Y + Z =
misery, x+y-Z =
bliss." from Peggy
who died months
later of meningitis
in three days. Dead
friends, dead boy
friends, cousins.
"Yours till Puffs"
signed Nora. One
page torn out near
warnings not to
fall in love to
Teddy, the Vamp,
the Curly Haired,
the woman my mother
was sure I'd never
believe she could
have been

Lyn Lifshin

She Wants to Belong to the Sky, Again

for Hollis Sigler who painted a painting with this name in 1981.

40 is afternoon when the light is still good,
the colors brilliant

Higher powers command me to do this -
complete the circle,
in recognition of what I am,
complete the circle.

recall the energy
fresh moist of birth
and return with a chiming
a calling of hours
delicate life pressed flowerlike
between two skies, suns, mercury vapor,
rare chemistry of moons.
making love on the beach in the rain
I felt one with the waves,
he felt shy of the intensity,
he named pause, the end
I knew it as breathing space.

40 is knowing where to look,
believing what I see,
no longer defining myself by the presence
or non-presence of a man in my life.
restructuring love brick by brick
considering the lovelines in his hands
the aspects in his stars
reading his eyes
and choosing to love, consciously....

Higher powers command me to do this -
complete the circle, rise up, evolve

I dream of avocados held soft in my hands

the texture, the size, the shape
a uterus so ripe
pregnant with a baby,
instead of just poems. . . .

Higher powers command me to do this -

expand to reality, industrial strength
gave myself a dose this morning
tasted of sequoia and sunshine
reality seasoned to taste
for a poet, only searching for some light. . . .
I believe in the power of the sun to heal
I lust the warmth upon my skin
I lust the warmth within my heart
I lust - at 40 I lust
I believe in the curative vibration of laughter
the cleansing catalyst of tears
that saving myself sometimes means pushing
beyond my own lacy borders. . . .

Higher powers command me to do this -
again and again -
complete the circle, rise up, expand,
slip frictionless into the sky,
blend to the blueness, evolve,
again and again -
shed clothing,
snake loose of skin,
return, arise, renewed,
become one with,
belong to the sky, again.

Susen James

Sidewalk

In grey, sheer textures of this
March sky
I follow the wet, familiar sidewalk

toward the heated building
choked
with workers, people who've turned up

their sleeves for the next eight hours.
The bus left me
not too far from there and lumbered away

heaving, thick and lowing onward
This narrow stretch
of cement divides a Bohemian cemetery

from the city University. There's something
sad in this
but the rain starts up again,

and I retract into my thick coat.
My feet are tired
from walking, following the relentless,

surreptitious melon on my shoulders that
can't differentiate
between the earth and sky.

Shallow puddles slowly rise
on the path
before me, I try to avoid

them and the hundred
of bloated worms
that rejected their soil.

Shane Swanson

Untitled

The moment I died I did not think
or wonder where I'd go.
I did not cry or clutch at life
but I let it slip out slow.
I did not scratch or claw the gates
or knock on Heaven's door,
but I set my heart upon the shelf
as the rest slipped to the floor.

Louise Schaefer

Contributor's Notes

M. B. Baken - Ms. Baken is a graduate student in creative writing at the University of Arkansas and has had work published in *Green Fuse* and *Kinnikinnik*.

Glen Brown - Glen's work has either appeared or is forthcoming in *Oyez Review*, *Poetry*, *Southcoast Poetry Journal*, *Willow Review* and others.

James C. Butler - James works for Shadow Traffic Network and as a Community Producer for cable access television.

Robert Klein Engler - Robert's poetry has appeared in *THING*, *Tribe*, *Christopher Street*, *The James Wright Review*, and *Amethyst*. He has published two books of poetry entitled, *Loose Change* and *Sonnets by Degree*. In 1989 he received an Illinois Arts Council Award for his poem "Flower Festival at Genzano," which appeared in *Whetstone*.

Susen James - Susen in 1991 co-edited *Stray Bullets, A Celebration of Chicago's Saloon Poets*.

Joan Payne Kincaid - Joan's work has appeared in three anthologies: *The Gulf War*, *Filtered Images* and *In the West of Ireland*. She has also published a chapbook of poetry entitled, *You Can Hear the Darkness Stirring*. Her most recent work has appeared in *Tight* and *Archae*.

Lyn Lifshin - Lyn has received many awards for her poetry including the Jack Keroauc award. She has authored over 80 books of poetry and has edited four anthologies of women's writing. A documentary film has been made depicting her life as a poet entitled, *Not Made of Glass*.

John McNally - John's fiction has appeared, or will appear, in the *Texas Review*, *New Mexico Humanities Review* and *Columbia*. Recent work has received citations in *The Best*

American Short Stories, 1991, and *The Pushcart Prize*, XV, a James Michener Fellowship, and two *Playboy College Fiction* contest awards (third place, 1988; second place, 1989).

Jason L. McVay - Jason has studied creative writing at the University of Arkansas.

Errol Miller - Errol's work has appeared in *Rhino*, *Oyez*, *Fuel*, *Vice Versa*, *Seams*, and *Bluff City*. Cosmic Trend Press of Canada has published a chapbook of his poetry entitled, *Blue Atlantis* and Errol has another forthcoming chapbook entitled *A Succession of Fine Lives* (March Street Press, North Carolina). Errol will also be featured in an interview of Southern writers published in *Southern Beat*.

Joan Plotkin - Joan is currently attending Northeastern Illinois University majoring in English Literature.

Louise Schaefer - Louise will receive her undergraduate degree from Northeastern Illinois University in the spring of 1993. She plans to begin graduate work in English at NEIU this summer.

Helen Reed - Helen's work has appeared in *The Willow Review*, *Rhino*, *Prairie Light Review*, *Interior Lighting*, *American Goat* and *Whetstone*. Her manuscript "Pulling Up the Dawn" was selected by Thorn Tree Press for publication in *Troika IV* which is now out in book form.

Cynthia Werner - (cover art) Cynthia studied photography and Art History at the Massachusetts College of Art and Harvard University in Cambridge. She is currently an undergraduate at Northeastern Illinois University majoring in biology.

Harry White - Harry White is the pen name of Harry White. He is the proud father of two boys who nevertheless still often find him a public embarrassment.

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