

Walking to school is a nightmare of cement and cracks, curbs, aggressive pedestrians and cars coming from so many directions I'd faint if I were less afraid of breaking my nose. But the real obstacle course begins at school -- classmates patting me on the back or just waving their arms dangerously near, desk lids trying to snap up my fingers, slippery wood floors, hard steep staircases, doorways, chairs, books, paper, pencils, windows and teachers.

Still I do have impulses to do the opposite of mummy & daddy's wishes, and right now, as the going home bell sounds with sufficient velocity to crack my skull, I'd like to take an axe and with it break every bone in my body.

#### OBSCENITY

Whenever I call a friend I have this desire to dial the wrong number and be obscene. I never do it but as I talk to my favorite people, cracking jokes and praising them, I make lewd gestures, take off my clothes and squeeze my breasts and roll my eyes in ecstasy. So I guess when they call me they do the same thing, because I'm not so unusual and could be a very good telephone operator because I have a clear, cultured voice, even in the middle of an orgasm, and can put my clothes back, clear my throat and brush my hair with the promptness and grace of the Queen of England. The pay is good too, I hear, so every time I rip my panties passionately I can join the long line of men and women buying new ones and thinking with the ferocity of perfectly normal geniuses of new ways to be obscene and get away with it.

-- Nichola Manning

Long Beach CA

#### POETIC NOISE

On St. Patrick's Day  
the New York Post  
was printed green  
and I got fired.  
It was a Wednesday, payday,  
and I got paid and fired  
and I stumbled out of a gray windowless warehouse

into drizzling and puddle strewn Brooklyn.  
I folded the paycheck into my pocket  
and I looked at three P.M. Brooklyn  
with rain on brick, rain on tar,  
gouged holes in the street, rubble barricades  
in the doorways of condemned buildings,  
dead objects in piles, Haitians standing  
against brick tenement walls under ledges  
out of the rain.

I walked to the subway.

I stood at the top of the stairs  
and gave one last look.

Cars went up and down Eastern Parkway.

The Bank was closed. The check cashing place was open.  
The numbers hole was open.

A cluster of black men stood in front  
of the yellow numbers storefront.

The words Bolitas and Combinations  
were written in red across the yellow.

Under the awning of the deli stood more  
black men. It continued to rain.

I went down into the subway.

I took the B.M.T. to Atlantic Avenue  
where I changed to the Double R.

I rode for an hour until I was in Queens.

As I opened the door I knew the place was empty.

There was an onion on the table. No signs of life.

I walked through the narrow railroad apartment.

I threw my coat over a chair.

I sat down in another chair.

It was dark, the apartment was dark and I felt myself  
get suddenly weak as the cars hissed and swam by  
downstairs in the street.

My next door neighbor, Ed, started singing.

I listened through the wall as he sang three notes.

There was something he was trying to do with those three  
notes

and I listened for it but it wasn't working.

He seemed to be trying to ascend a scale.

Then my downstairs neighbor started playing his piano.

It was loud and slightly out of tune.

He lunged forward, arrogantly, stood on a chord,

I think he was standing on the keyboard,

then his left hand tried to create some rhythm.

He kept missing notes. He kept slipping.

I stopped listening.

Then my wife came home and I went to greet her.

We kissed. She held a paper bag of something that she  
put down on the table beside the onion.

I told her I was fired and she said she thought it was  
great.

She said we could drink, we could stay up all night, talk,

lay around and smooch. She smiled like a child.  
I held her face in my hands and kissed her.  
"You don't have to go to Brooklyn anymore," she said.  
We both nodded solemnly.  
Then someone knocked on the door and she opened it and  
it was Ed, the next door singer. She let him in and  
they started  
to talk.  
I went back to my chair and couldn't hear what they said.  
It became night as they talked.  
The cars went by and the rain stopped.  
Ed went back to his apartment and my wife came in.  
She smiled, bent down to kiss me and then sat in my lap.  
We listened to apartment sounds: movement, pipe noises,  
floor boards groaning under weight, distant televisions.  
I don't have to go to Brooklyn anymore, I thought.  
I can stay in Queens forever.

#### THE MAD WOMEN OF UNEMPLOYMENT

They really want me to get a job.  
One of them, a fat one, an ugly squat New York type  
middle aged wench, a bitch, a foul thick slow  
serious dull dumb purposeful slob of a woman  
once said to me at an interview:  
"Where do you get off?"  
in reference to my suggestion that I was looking  
for a job that might pay more than the 5.40  
an hour she was offering me as a stock clerk  
in Chatsworth.  
And she was serious and reasonable and smiling.  
She really wanted to know where I got off.  
I contained my anger. I vibrated.  
I didn't say  
anything.  
She filled out some little cards and papers  
and then sent me to the interview  
out in Chatsworth.  
I vowed to myself as I drove the stupid  
monotonous streets  
that if she fucked up my unemployment  
and if my checks stopped coming through  
I would kill that little bureaucratic hog-woman.  
But my checks came through anyway  
and I didn't have to kill her.  
Another woman looked up into my frowning face  
as I handed her the forms she'd asked me to fill out,  
and she squealed in protest, looking at the forms,  
that I wasn't eligible for an interstate claim.  
She was in agony. She had the face of a little girl,  
stupid with fear, trapped beneath the filmy horror