

Janus
1993

The Janus Staff 1992-1993

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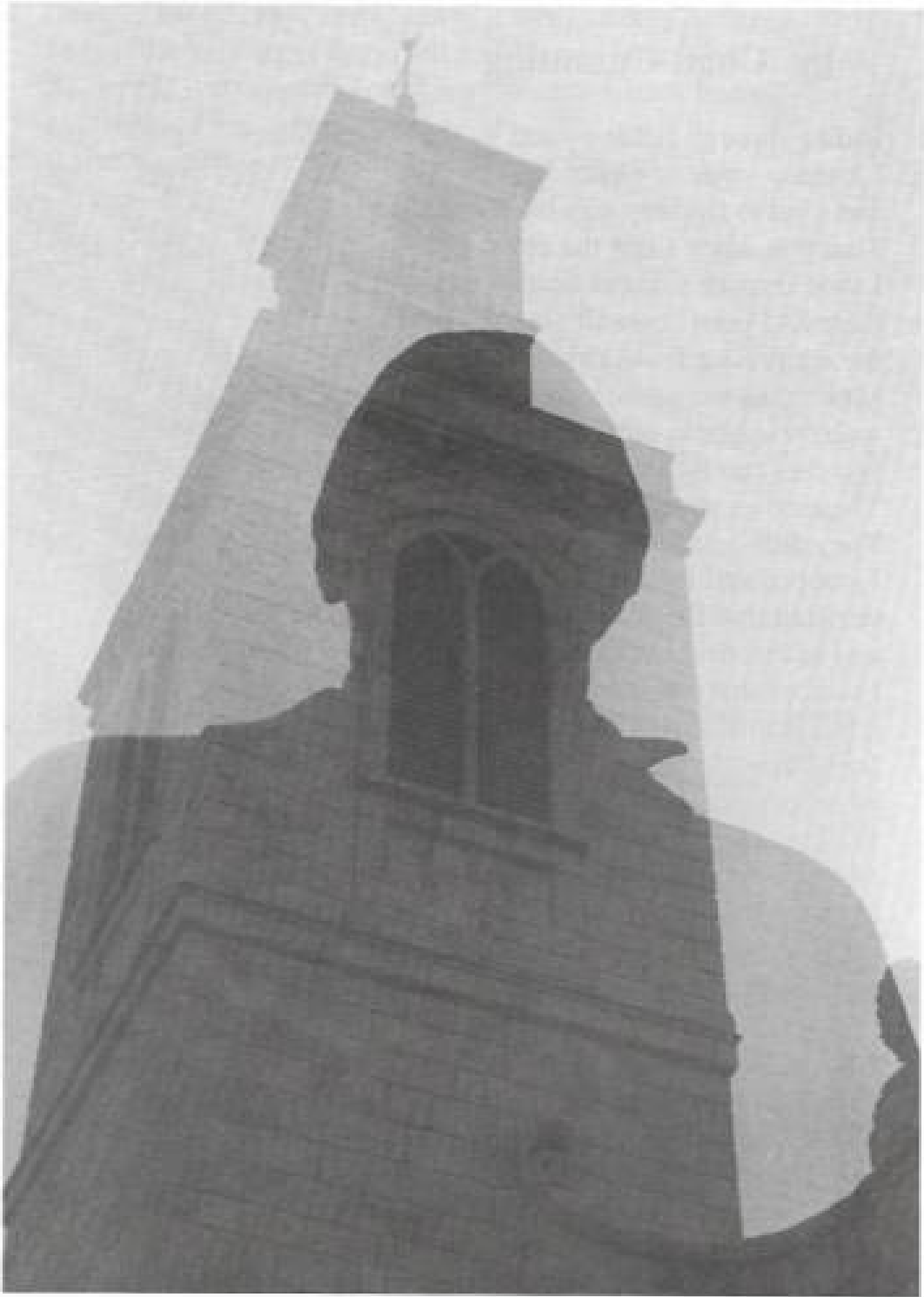


photo by Jay Kish

Learning About Cows

by Chad Cumming

Riding through fields owned by the State Parks
I lost my sense of direction
and tried to find my way back to the car.
That was when I saw the cows.
I should make a distinction here,
there had been cows all over the fields
the entire time I was enjoying myself
Most cows would look me over
with their blank, nerveless stares
and then run away if I came too close.
These cows were different.
They didn't run.
I stopped and looked at them,
thinking that I'd never really looked at a cow
and in that first examination
I noticed that one was very different-
it had horns.
So I started to move back,
which seemed to disturb him more
I say this because he mooed a husky "moo"
and defected with a contemptuous flip of his tail
as through this was a withering bovine insult.
I was not about to respond in kind,
so I pedaled away as quickly as possible
inspired by the sound of his hooves
coming toward me in an almost casual trot.
The sound of those hooves made me think
that the only knowledge I had of cows
was from a "Far Side" book.
Gary Larson never covered the techniques
of evading an animal the size of a Nissan,
so I peddled faster--it seemed the best choice.

Luckily for me, he lost interest and went back to his herd so that the lady cows could tell him he was so macho. As for me, I eventually found my car, drove back home, and enjoyed a nice prime rib. It was the only way I could salvage my dignity.

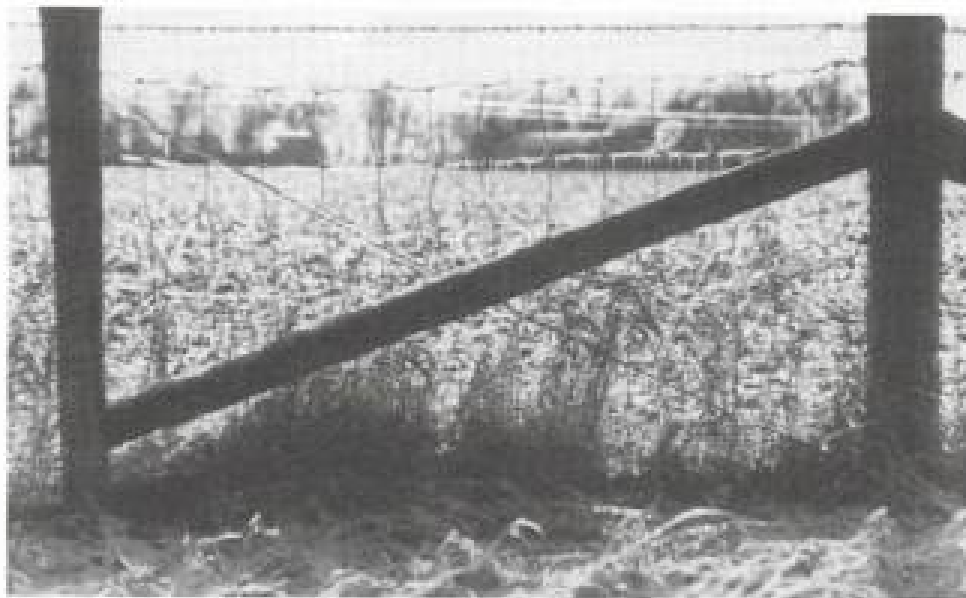


Photo by Dan Beckley

The Aunt Francis Way

by Tonya Smith

Aunt Francis made
going to funerals
an art form.
To have her at a service
was like having a famous
vaudevillian visit a nursing home.
Half of the time
she never knew the deceased
but that never stopped
my dear aunt.
Death days were her days to shine.
With her salt and pepper wig
slightly tilted by the
weight of her death shroud
Francis was the star
of every funeral
in town.
She would wail, "Dear God
Save Us!" And pass out,
her skeletal frame
draped dramatically over the casket,
stealing the stage from the corpse.
It was her show stopper.
She was the life of the funeral
And for a moment
she made everyone
forget about death
of a loved one.
Now, if that isn't entertainment
I don't know what is.

Culture in the 90's

by Sandra Crouch

I love classical music. My collection includes Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, and Vivaldi. Yup, they're all on that one free tape I got with the purchase of my favorite push-up bra from Victoria's Secret.

And art, I love it! My best friend's got two Monet prints on her wall and I wear Paloma Picasso perfume. Isn't she some art guy's daughter?

I've read all the classics, too. Me and Cliff are speedy readers. It took us only twenty minutes to read Tale of Two Cities. Twice.

And I know how to ask someone to go to bed with me in French:

Voulez vous se coucher avec moi ce soir?

-- Pretty sexy, huh? -- And I can do a double pirouette, except I don't land with my feet together in a tight fifth position (more like a sprawling fourth in pigeon-toe with two pulled hamstrings)

but I get around two times and that's what matters.

David

by Abby Jacob

You call at five o'clock
wanting to see me once
before we say
good-bye
for four months.
I get in your car
and light a cigarette
as you calmly tell me
that I will kiss you
tonight.
I know you are right,
but say nothing.

We go to Jazz-
a small piece of New Orleans
in the heart of West Texas.
It brings me memories
of my grandfather's stories
about my parents' engagement
in that Cajun city.
It brings you memories
of Sandy-
she ended your romance
a year ago.
In your eyes,
I steal a glimpse
of you touching her hair
before you slowly
closethem-
shutting the memory and me
out.

We stuff ourselves full
of crayfish, popcorn shrimp,
and blackened catfish.
With greasy hands
we finish our Shiner Bocks
and light up, once more.
You tell me I have nice hair-
you like the color.
I tell you thanks-
but your comment
is unnecessary.

Four pitchers of beer later,
we stumble into my house-
trying not to wake my parents
with our careful steps-
upstairs- one foot
in front of the other-
no stumbling-
into my room.
They wake, but remember
the actions of their youth-
which perfectly matched ours.

I stretch out on the floor,
with my head in your lap
as you play with my hair
and stare at me awkwardly.
We kiss and we both know-
no questions to ponder,
no ifs to calculate.
I let myself sink
into the warm swirling heat
of the room,
allow your lips to speak
to my body-

responding with every
move, grind,
sway.

Your weight hard on
me, pressing me
to fit your mold.
I conform like clay-
I conform
like clay
and take you into me.
Hands on your bare back
rising

 falling
as you clutch my head
whispering your half-truths.
We rise together
and explode.
You tense and collapse-
shivering white skin
in the pale moonlight
from the window.

I hold you and finger
your dark purple-tinted curls.
You softly kiss me,
saying that we
have waited so long.

The moist heat in the room
suffocates us
as we gather our clothes
and carefully walk
downstairs- one foot
in front of the other
Outside, the cold air shocks

our warm dizzy heads,
clearing our thoughts.
You hug me long and hard
and walk away
silently- one foot
in front of the other.

Eight hours later,
I pack my things,
get in my car,
and drive back to school.
For fifteen hours
I ride-stiff-legged with
sore, bruised,
carpet-burned knees.
The further I travel,
the more I think of you.

You tell me
love does not exist.
There is friendship, sex,
and the monster
in the middle.
I say your name out-loud-

 David
and wonder why you
don't possess the strength
to challenge and conquer
the giant monster, your
Goliath and why we
must always be so careful
not to stumble
as we move on-
one foot
in front of the other.

The Sympathy of Gulls

by Chad Cumming

While studying for a midterm
I think of Jason Patterson
and his photographic memory-
Summa cum laude without
ever opening a book
you went to Vanderbilt
without even paying a dime
and flunked out:
Everyone said it was drugs.
But we expected the ole B.M.O.C.
to pull off a comeback until
they found your body
on some anonymous Mexican beach
abandoned weeks before
by thugs you 'd hooked up with-
they had beaten you to death
and left you to rot.
I don't mourn because of
the lost potential-
like some shiny christmas
fire truck that is played
with once and then forgotten,
but because you died alone-
the closest thing to sympathy
as you hacked the pink mist
of your last breaths onto the sand
was the blank looks of seagulls
as they waited for dinner
to quit moving around so much.



Photo by Sandi Crouch

At the University Hospital and Clinics

by Chad Cumming

Inmate #66576's chest was pushed up
and down by a respirator
the machine relentlessly breathing for him
long after he had stopped trying.
AIDS had pounced on him like so many
in that quasi-society of the penitentiary
his throat played the rhythm of his death-
a steady hollow rattle like a wind chime
of sparrow bones in a numbing January wind.
A security guard looked up from Tom Clancy
as #66376's heart began to fail-
mildly interested by people in scrubs bustling about,
their arms waving needles and bags over his body
like the limbs of frantic trees
in a race to jolt back what God wanted
so the State could remove it later,
Later the guard plodded along beside the orderly
through the basement corridors
walking on his toes so that he could see
a short nurses behind over the shroud.
Only after they've unzipped a new body bag
do they take the handcuffs off
the thin, thin wrist and the bed rail.

Hypothesis Upon Punching A Wall

by Ethan Whitehill

Given that your
fist is roughly
the diameter
of your heart, and
that you and your
girlfriend have just
argued about
jealousy,
 prove
she is greater
than your ex and
solve for why.

Last night after
we fought, I drove
my hand into a wallpaper
pattern so
nauseatingly repetitious a
and parallel
it vibrated;
I discovered
that decorative
geometry
doesn't mix with
crossed-eyes and straight
bourbon whiskey
from Kentucky,
logic dissolves
in vodka and
tonic, and we

really didn't
mean what was said.
Plotting x-rays
and out-patient
lines against
calculated
words, subtracting
deductibles,
 and correcting
errors of standard
deviation,
drunken tangents,
and her curves--
I have proven
that fists, like hearts,
break easily
when you're in love.

Cleaning Out My Wallet

by Ethan Whitehill

Yesterday, I threw away
your senior picture.
I don't know why,
because you were a different person then;
just a hair-sprayed
high-school girl in lip gloss
who loved her boyfriend--
allegedly without end.
Maybe I did it because
the photo was illegibly
stained by the blue ink
of an old receipt.
Or maybe I did it because
a crease ran wrinkly
across the middle like
an amputated love line.
Then again, that's probably
the reason I pulled it
from the trash today.

Coffee

by Dan Beckley

I remember the time, after those double burbon and cokes at Joe's, waking up early Sunday morning and heading down to the bagel shop on State Street in Santa Barbra. The fog, low, blanketed between the ocean and the mountains, and the air, brisk. I could smell the French Vanilla brewing in the store, as I tried to remember if it was the poppy seed or the onion bagel that you liked. You must have noticed the bed lost some warmth, becuase when I returned, you stood in the kitchen in your pink terry cloth bath robe that was tied tightly, outlining your beautiful curves. You stood over the chopping block, dicing ripe tomatoes, that we got the Thursday beofre at the farmers market in San Luis Obispo. You prepared the cottage cheese while I fixed the bagels, and we sat there at the samll black table, looking out the bay window at the Los Padres mountains. In one moment, when we were done, I leaned over to kiss you on the cheek, taking your plate to the sink. On my return I filled the coffee mugs, lit the cigarettes, and dealt the cards. And now I'm sitting here along, with a borrwed coffee maker, Folgers original in a styrofoam cup, smoking, writing.

Bus Stop

by Abby Jacob

It was one of those cold, dreary days. A grey mist hung in the air like a cloud of smoke in a bar. The sky sporadically sprinkled droplets on the heads of the crowded, shuffling masses, baptizing them in the water of the polluted city. They pushed on towards their individual chores and duties, ignoring the weather. On the corner of Seventh Avenue and Winston, a large crowd sought shelter in the glass bus stop booth. Spilling out of the booth, the crowd was huddled together, continually checking their watches, waiting, just as they did every afternoon at four forty-five. They all clutched the habitual correct change in their hands, except for one young woman, who was new to the city and unacquainted with its ways.

She stands nervously watching her child in his stroller, his face distorted by the clear, plastic raincover on the stroller. He is intently watching all the people rush by him. The single young secretary in her navy business suit and her white tennis shoes, the couple, so much in love they refuse to allow the crowd to tear them apart, the blind man in sunglasses with his observant, obedient lead dog, the teenagers, too young to be smoking, calling attention to themselves with their loud voices, and the businessman with a wallet full of pictures of his three beautiful children in his pocket.

The young woman smiles at her son's curiosity, knowing that he must be the most precious child in the world. Behind her, an older woman with salt and pepper hair walks out of a 7-11 tucking a newly purchased lottery ticket into her cheap black handbag. The stroller catches her eye at once. She approaches the young woman and comments on what a lovely child she has. The young woman swells with pride telling her,

"He's my first. I hate to have him out in this weather, but I had to settle some things at our new bank and I just can't bear to leave him with a sitter."

"Of course, besides, you never know who you can trust these days. If I had children, I think I would have to quit my job just so I could stay at home with them and keep them safe."

"You don't have any children?"

"No. We tried, but after I lost the third one my doctor told me that my body just wasn't equipped to bear children."

"I am so sorry."

"Oh, it's all right. It was hard, at first, but now I have an excuse to spoil my nieces. What's his name?"

"This is Jeremy. He is six months old. How old are your nieces?"

"Let's see, Ashley is four and Jessica is two. They are quite a handful!" Sometimes I think I'm lucky because I don't have to watch them all the time. They run my sister ragged."

"I know, children are hard work even at this age!" the young woman said straightening the plastic cover on the stroller. "I can't believe so many people are waiting for the bus."

"It's like this every day. Most people ride the bus to work. I guess you're not from this city."

"No, we just moved here from Michigan. My husband got a job offer that he just couldn't pass up. Everything here is so different, it's going to take time to get used to it. How much does the bus cost here?"

"A dollar seventy-five. Listen, this bus driver is really picky—you have to have the correct change or he won't let you get on the bus."

"You're kidding? All I have is a five. Would you stand here and watch Jeremy, for just a minute, while I run into the 7-11 to get change? I don't want to wake him. He didn't sleep very well last night."

"Sure, it would be my pleasure. But hurry, the bus should be here any minute."

As she walks into the 7-11 she has to laugh at her naive views of people in the city. She thought that they would all be rude and uncaring, she is glad she was wrong. She takes her place at the end of the line and glances at the woman and her son through the glass doors. The woman is slowly pushing the stroller back and forth, in a rocking motion. The young woman smiles waves, and the older woman waves back. Moving closer to the front of the line, a tabloid catches her eye. She reads, "Woman Gives Birth to Two-Headed Baby" and she laughs. Glancing through the glass doors again she sees the stroller, but the older woman has disappeared.

She runs out of the store, fighting the crowd to protect her helpless child, alone in a mass of people. Finally, she reaches the stroller, as the bus arrives and the crowd pushes toward it. Sighing with relief that she had reached the stroller before the crowd trampled it, she looks into the stroller only to find that the stroller is empty. From far away the plastic cover had fooled her into believing that her son was in the stroller. As she frantically searches for the older woman in the sea of people, the bus pulls away from its stop, leaving the young woman alone on the sidewalk.



Photo by Joel Hopper

Grumps

by Abby Jacob

Sixteen and confident that I know everything, Grumps takes me into the backyard to pass on the family knowledge. He smiles as he digs two holes in the soft earth with a kitchen spoon.

"Smartass", he says pointing to the first hole, "this is your ass." He points to the second hole.

"This is a hole in the ground. Got it?"

I get it.

"Now, which is your ass?"

I point to the first hole, with an odd glance in his direction.

"Holy Shit! You mean to tell me that you don't even know your ass from a hole in the ground?"

I cherish this wisdom.

Five years later, I drive
to visit him

in the hospital.

They called it "sudden death".

My Gram told us

that it scared the shit out of her.

Elaborate tubes, wires, machines,

monitors, beeps, lights...

octopussed around his yellow-pale body.

Complicated jigsaw puzzles,

we couldn't understand.
We leaned together, held hands,
and waited.
The first words out of his mouth were,
"Son of a bitch! What happened?"
We told him about his fall,
how his heart stopped,
how we almost lost him.
He thought the whole story
was simply fascinating.
Some called it a miracle.
I knew
that he knew
that we
needed him.

Today, I call him at home. He is weak, but "plugging
along", as he calls it. As I sit down to write
this poem, I know it can never capture the feelings
I have for him, but, when he reads it he will say,
"Holy Shit! You do know your ass from a hole in the
ground!"
And he will understand.

The Beginning

by Kent Palmer

"I am not sure I should tell you this," pondered my friend Mike as he stared out the window. The diffuse gray light of January entered his eyes.

Mike and I were in the midst of a conversation that had transformed our comfortable room into a time machine of sorts: For we were talking about fathers and sons, and *our* fathers and *our* sons, and our talk had raced back and forth along the time line between our memories and our hopes.

Mike turned his head towards me and began his story.

"After I graduated from college in 1972, I searched for a way to avoid the draft. I finally decided to enlist as a volunteer for VISTA, instead of the army, and go to the jungles of New York City, not those of Vietnam.

"When the day came to leave home for my assignment, my parents took me and nearly all my belongings to the train station in Washington, D.C. Never had I traveled with so much stuff as I had with me then, but I was about to set up my first bachelor home- in the 'Big Apple', no less - and I felt all of it was necessary. Nevertheless, this excess baggage was more of a hassle than I had expected. I cannot remember exactly what happened during my parting moments with my parents; I was too anxious to be on my way. I recall that I soon picked up all my bags and went quickly through the gates, excited about moving to New York.

"The next thing I remember occurred just after I found my seat on the train. I was arranging my gear when one of the silhouettes moving about in my peripheral vision suddenly assumed a familiar form; I looked up into the eyes of my father. He was viewing me through the window directly across the

aisle from my seat. I was very surprised to see him at that moment -- almost startled. His right hand moved slightly, and I returned his salute with a smile.

"The train suddenly began the trek to New York with the loud squeal of steel slipping on steel. I was on my way! I started to arrange my bags again, even though I was distracted by delicious images of life on my own. But my daydreams lasted only seconds before I realized my father was still looking at me through the same window! At that instant he had to walk briskly to keep up with the train, but soon he had to run. The track noises got louder as the train went faster, and as the flanges on the wheel made contact with the rails, I began to sway from side to side like a metronome. All the while, I gazed through that window at my father and his race with the train. And when the train won, I watched the image of my father slip backwards; first, to an adjacent window, then back to another, then another, and another, until, finally, I lost him.



Photo by Dan Beckley

If You're Still Angry When You Get Home, I'll Listen

by Scott Pitcock

Cold rain was coming down again. It had been falling in this off-and-on fashion for the past few days, which included Halloween. Seth Roberts carried a grocery sack in each arm as he walked to the family car, on the far side of the supermarket parking lot. He avoided the puddles, to his own minor dismay, because he'd accidentally left his rubber-soled boots in his locker back at school. Now, in the late afternoon, he was running errands for his father in canvas sneakers, jeans, a parka, and a ball cap, the last of which kept raindrops off the lenses of his glasses. He was sixteen and had been shopping alone, so he was smoking a cigarette.

The family car that Seth had taken out for the afternoon was a five-year-old Oldsmobile, the better of the two cars that defined the Roberts' circle drive-way. Both were cars far beyond their respective primes, and both were unreliable. The Roberts family did not ride in them with any sort of pride, as some of the other people in their neighborhood rode in their own cars. Nor had they been driving them for so long by choice.

Seth was walking back toward what he and his family called "the white one." The Oldsmobile was a white two-door, decent in appearance, with two small dents on its front bumper. This car had a far better track record than their other one—a 1978 Ford Granada—which was known as "the red one." The

red Granada had been bought at a small cost about a year ago, used. Everyone in the family hated it, save for the pragmatic Mrs. Roberts, who was always reminding them that a lot of things wouldn't get done if it weren't around. Todd, Seth's younger brother, was correct in considering the car a jalopy. He avoided riding in it whenever possible. He was twelve and had other things, more important things, to be embarrassed about.

Inside the car, Seth put out his cigarette and turned the ignition key. It did not turn over and made no sound. He pumped the gas a couple of times, not yet in a panic. Nothing. Then in a sudden jerk he looked quickly to his right and left, as if a giggle had come from some audience that had been secretly watching him all the while. Raindrops were sliding down each window, then colliding and dividing without a pattern. They fell softly. He tried again, and still nothing.

Then he spoke, in a plain tone: "C'mon, you piece of shit. Let's go, c'mon now. You're the *white* one, for Christ's sake! C'mon!" And he tried again, and there was nothing again. The white Olds, Seth presumed, had yet another dead battery.

He left the groceries in the front passenger seat and locked the car. There was a pay phone over near the store's entrance. While walking, he wondered if anyone would be at home to answer. His brother would either be at basketball practice or over at a friend's house. His father would be out in "the red one," picking up Kristen, Seth's older sister, from work. But his mother would be there. And she would be asleep, because she earned a living teaching art to first through fifth graders, and that was enough of a day for anyone.

His father, Mr. Roberts, was a writer, and he had a book due out next March, but everything was going to be tight until then. What this close (yet quiet) family was doing now was either adapting to change or suffering at the mercy of it. It depended on which member of the family you asked, and also, what kind of mood that person was in at the given moment. But

all were waiting for New York to put the book out, and this waiting could bring them together just as it could divide them. Seth again avoided the puddles while walking back across the parking lot. At the phone, he dialed home and lit up a cigarette. The top end of the black receiver felt cold on his ear. The connection was clear. His mother answered and he knew she had not yet fallen asleep.

Seth said, "Mom, the white one won't start."

Mrs. Roberts sighed. "Oh . . . shit. You're kidding."

"I turned the key and there's nothing," he said, flatly.

"So you think it's the battery?"

"I guess."

A pause.

Seth drew on his cigarette, careful to exhale away from the receiver. And then, strangely, he heard his mother let out a slight, extended breath into her end of the line. She was also smoking. He could hear her making the very sound that he himself was trying to hide: someone smoking, as carried over a telephone line. If he could catch it, could she? Did she know he smoked? Was it a give-a-way? Probably not. And, at the moment, it wouldn't have mattered to him if she did. But, in this short silence, he looked up at the advertisement posters in the supermarket windows and he pictured his mother smoking. Her head slightly tilted back; her hand bringing the cigarette to her lips. Barely cocking her left eye as her mouth slowly pulled in the smoke. Her elbow resting on a table; her hand holding it with a look of delicacy in its fingers. Her facial expression suggesting attention, listening. Her eyes revealing that there were ideas at work. Seth knew girls his own age who smoked like this. They were mostly punkers—the punk girls at school—and they faked a lot of things, but smoking wasn't one of them.

His mother said, "Seth, did you leave the lights on?" Her voice was concerned and kind.

"What?"

"Did you leave the lights on? The headlights." The politeness with which she had answered the phone was back in her tone. She was going over all the options she could think of. In a way, she'd been put on the spot, but now, as always, she knew when it was time to think and speak carefully.

"Why would I? It won't be dark for another hour and a half!"

"I was just asking, Seth. I'm just trying to figure out what's gone wrong." Mrs. Roberts allowed that the boy's sarcasm was too be expected. Especially now.

Seth said, "It isn't the lights."

"All right," she said. "I'll tell your dad to drive out there when he gets back. You guys can jump the battery or I'll have it towed in the morning."

Seth said, "Oh, he's going to love driving that Granada out here, after going to get Kristen."

Mrs. Roberts said, "I'm going to tell him to come right out for you, as soon as he gets back. I want you to go back to the white one and find the jumper cables. I think they're in that compartment in the trunk. With the spare. Don't worry if you can't find them, Seth, because somebody might've left them in the red one instead."

She waited calmly for a moment for Seth to acknowledge her instructions. He was silent. He smoked and stared out at the parking lot, out at the cars that started right up without any problems. Mrs. Roberts went on: "He'll be there as soon as he can, Seth. And don't forget to lock it up if you have to leave it."

Seth said, "Yeah. Okay. See you later." He quietly spat on to the pavement and then tried to drop his cigarette directly into the small circle of spit. It missed, barely, and he held the phone and said nothing.

His mother said, "If you're still angry when you get home, I'll listen." And then they both hung up.

So it was car trouble again. Seth walked back to the white one slowly. He knew that he would still be angry when he got home. He intended to hold on to this anger, saving his words until he got home and could talk in private with his mother. At this age, he could not yet complain to his father. He could not bitch about how the same things kept breaking down around the house, or about how there was not enough money to get a "decent car." And these were the sorts of things he often wound up talking about when his mother would sit him down and then somehow manage to get him to spill everything.

"Everything," she'd say. "Start at the beginning."

But it was impossible for him to show his father disrespect. At least, to show it openly. And so far, it seemed as if this would always be impossible; he had respected him more than any other man he'd known or known about. And he had respected him in this way for too long. Seth was nevertheless aware of this respect, of how it was complete. It was in some ways truer than such things as love or affinity or satisfaction. The respect itself existed in its own right as an oddity: it was accurate and endless and beyond conjecture, but it was somehow also natural. An actualized impossibility. A clock that ran on air. A reverential Stonehenge.

Back at the car, Seth sat in the driver's seat smoking. He watched for his father carefully, so that he would have plenty of time to throw the cigarette out the window before the Granada pulled up to save the day. He would not gripe at his mother, he resolved. Even in his anger, even in this anger, he could realize that she was better than anyone else at understanding him. Why make her feel bad by over-doing things? He would just speak to her generally about how he was feeling.

He felt colder, there in the seat. He finished the smoke. It was getting colder, but he knew his father would be there soon. It was a rather long drive out to the supermarket. Seth decided to get out and comb around the trunk. He would have the cables

ready. His father would show up. Everything would go quickly and smoothly. And then he'd be right at back home, whether the white Olds started back up or not.

But, while reaching down at the door handle, he saw something that changed the entire afternoon. Something that changed what he had planned to say to his mother. Something that suddenly made him forget a lot of what was on his mind. Something confusing that actually made him blink.

The headlight knob was pulled all the way out.

Seth fell back into the seat, breathing somewhat heavier than before. He stared at the raindrops on the front window that were no longer moving, because the rain had let up some short while ago. Probably when he was on the phone, he mused.



Photo by Joel Hopper

Thee Ingredient

by Homer T. Larsen Professor Emeritus,
Westminster College.

Once upon a time, a RULER called on a very Wise Man and asked that he travel the world over and find THE MOST PRECIOUS INGREDIENT. After long travels the Wise Man returned and reported that INTEGRITY was THE MOST PRECIOUS INGREDIENT. Then the RULER called his Son and said: "I want you to be a whole . . . an Integer, not a Fraction. 'If you, to your own self be true, you will never be false to anyone.'" Then the SON inquired of his Father: "How do I determine, or distinguish, the true from the false—the real from the counterfeit?"

The Father took then golden coins, arranged them in a stack, and instructed his Son to knock the stack over then to carefully stack them again . . . and then repeat the process over and over for six days. The obedient Son did, tho it was a most monotonous chore.

On the sixth day the Father took the stack, and after spreading it on the table, surreptitiously substituted one coin for another. Then the lad was asked to stack the coins once more. He suddenly stopped, looked at on and said: "This is different. Is it false . . . counterfeit?" His Father answered: "If you become accustomed to only that which is true, you will be able to distinguish the false . . . the counterfeit. 'What you are going to be Tomorrow—Today you are fast becoming.' Remember: 'The good is the enemy of the best.' And also remember: 'That actions speak louder than words.' 'By their fruits you will know them.' "

IF . . . I were going to vote for a person who was to be on a governing board which might determine my destiny, my way of life . . . I would want that person to have INTEGRITY in both word and deed, with simple words: YES or NO rather than lengthy verbiage. There have been contracts signed by each party saying a single word . . . contracts that have lasted lifetimes. Have you noticed that many times when one begins their speech by saying: "I have nothing to say," they often give wordy evidence?

Years ago J.P. Alley had a comic strip with a character named Hambone, that appeared in many southern papers. WE would first read the headlines of the paper, and then turn to see what saying Hambone had for that day. One that I vividly remember was: "Pending on some folks is lak' leanin' on a fence post that ain't there."

INTEGRITY -- implies Dependability. And we there -- whatever our age?

Women's Work

by Abby Jacob

Cutting tomatoes for the perfect salad, she slices her own finger by accident. Fascinated, she watches the blood break through the barrier of skin, which has imprisoned it for thirty years. Silently, the blood rushes down the length of her finger, like a thief escaping from a blaring alarm. Quick droplets roll off the end of her thumb, meeting the red flesh of the fragmented tomatoes, soaking in, vanishing, leaving no trace of their existence. She finds some sick joy in the fact that, at least, her blood is set free as she continues to prepare the vegetables, just the way he likes them.

discovery

by Abby Jacob

stopping by a garage sell on my way home
i find a tattered worn grammar book from 1890
flipping through the brown pages stained with age and small
hands
i discover another time
the inside cover reads frank ecton fulton school
in thoughtful exact cursive letters
strange verb forms and old-fashioned capitalization rules
catch my eye
thou hadst been thou werst
always capitalize the first letter of every line of a poem
I think of whitman cummings and sexton

Grace and Strength

by Tim Goggin

The blow took him by surprise, his face twisted from the pressure. Both eyes watered, his vision was gone. Both arms sagged, his guard was low. He knew what was going to happen next. Another blow bashed up against the side of his head. His mouthpiece was full of blood. His nose ached from the continual pounding. His stomach burned; his legs didn't feel right. His mind wandered, he thought of youth.

Daniel loved to watch the fights on television. He liked the violence and the blood, but he also respected the grace and strength the fighters possessed. Like many boys his age, he aspired to train and try the risk of the canvas ring, but his mom always laughed at the idea. His dad was indifferent, but in some ways like the idea because it would teach Daniel to protect himself. Being thirteen-years-old, he was at the perfect age to begin training.

The next Christmas, his parents bought him a speed-bag to set up in the basement. Everyday after school, Daniel went downstairs and punched on the bag until his arms were too tired to lift. At first, like any pubescent teenager, he was clumsy. But after a few short months he improved. He continued to watch the fights on television, and often he would run into the hallway where the full-length mirror was and shadowbox. His tall, slender, yet muscular body moved quickly. He was determined never to give up.

By the time he was fourteen, he was ready. That old speed-bag taught him well. His dad did most of the teaching--he had boxed in the military and had a decent record. Daniel remembered a speech his father once told him, "Always keep your guard up." Then he would say, "If you drop your guard, you'll get hit in the nose, and if that happens your eyes'll water up.

"I dropped my guard once during a fight on the Enterprise. I had won twice that day, and it was waiting for my last fight of the day. I was fighting some pipefitter I'd never seen before. He wasn't as big as me, but I'll be damned if that guy wasn't the quickest boxer I ever saw."

"What happened Dad?"

"Well, after fighting two tough fights, your arms get a little tired. I only dropped them for a second and BAM! He socked me square on my lid. I had blood and tears in my eyes."

"Did he knock you out?"

"Well, I couldn't see. I tried to swing blindly, but he tagged me in my breadbasket. It was over."

Daniel backed off, and tried to bring his guard up. Daniel wanted a second to clear his head. Relentlessly his opponent stepped forward with Dan. One jab to the stomach, then another. Daniel wanted to vomit. His head tucked behind his gloves. Both elbows dropped to protect his stomach. Only if he could get a chance to clear his eyes, he might be able to throw a few punches. Daniel opened his eyes, and the opponent threw a straight landing on the crown of his head. A throbbing pain spread through his brain.

Without thought, Daniel took two steps towards his opponent. He draped both sluggish arms around him. Someone in the crowd yelled, "Stick a fork in him!" Boos filled the large complex. A round of misguided uppercuts attacked Daniel, without success. In the process, the fighters' heads bashed together, both men let out grunts. The taste of bile lingered in Daniel's mouth. After a few seconds, the referee pushed the two away from each other. The bell rang, a blackened haze fell over his thoughts.

Daniel's first fight was a week away. His dad had given him all the knowledge he knew. The two of them drove to the sporting complex a few miles from their home to sign Daniel up in the juvenile boxing league tournament. When they arrived,

they found all sorts of kids waiting in line. A large man sitting behind a thick oak table was signing papers. Next to his chair was a scale.

"How old are you son?" The fat man asked.

"Fourteen."

"If you'll step on the scale and your father'll take a look at these papers, you'll be set."

"All right, looks like you weigh one-fifty. You weigh a lot for such a skinny kid."

"This your first fight boy?"

"Yeah, am I going to fight someone my age, or am I put in a weight class?" Daniel asked.

"You'll be fighting someone your age and your weight."

A few days later Daniel and his father drove back to the complex. Daniel's stomach hurt. He was afraid to lose. In the ring, his opponent was much shorter than Daniel, but thicker. Both boys wore head guards and heavily padded gloves. Daniel learned that unlike the boxing he saw on television where the winner was the last man standing, this type of boxing match was not to knock out your opponent, but to score more points. Daniel, in fact, scored much higher than his opponent that day. His fast hands, and his quick moves were too much for the shorter, thick boy. Daniel's father was very proud of him.

Daniel did not want to get up from the chair. He took a good beating last round. A severe migraine set in from that punch that took him by surprise on his head last round. His eyes had cleared up, but his nose was definitely broken. Daniel's trainer poured cool water on the top of his head. And with a cotton ball, he swabbed vaseline over Daniel's eyebrows and nose. Daniel could not understand what his trainer was saying, his mind was elsewhere.

The bell rang. Daniel slowly raised from the chair. The trainer patted him on his back and gave last minute instructions. He looked across the ring, the opponent appeared refreshed.

The referee said, "Come out fighting clean, gentlemen." With one quick move, the opponent stepped forward with a straight to Dan's chin, a right jab to his right ear, and then an upper cut again to his chin. His head pounded from the borage of punches. Daniel's jaw ached with the a broken feeling.

Daniel looked through the window to his backyard where his young son was playing. It was a sunny day and he could see his reflection in the glass. He looked down at his gnarled, weather beaten hands, and hoped his son would never grow up.



Photo by Sandi Crouch

Ultra-Phallic

by Andrew Jones

Power
created by money + sex
politicians fueled by sex
sex on the underbelly
soft and secret
rocket-cock
bursting thru virgin atmosphere
small cells
of man
curious + quick
to pronounce + explain
to stumble over
unventured valleys
of sex
raw, intimidating
feeling, pulsing
curious energy
perpetuates in our thoughts
actions
an incentive for nothing.

Asleep

by Andrew Jones

Under an ancient sky
a city yawns
in its false glow,
empty streets
with endless cracks
trees shiver in the wild night,
lying back on the cool grass,
black night encompasses all.
Do you feel the rushing wind
blowing through your hair
and between your legs?

 She divines water
 and peace
 and love
and a warm bed
sleep slides over us like a
dreamy serpent,
find the cool side
and fall asleep.

Five Ways To Look At The Stars

by Tonya Smith

I

The children sat around the fire, occasionally leaning back on their elbows to look for the Lady Star. The Cherokee Indians spoke of how she protected this land from all natural disasters. The kids just wanted to make sure she was still in the sky.

II

The last night of our freshman year, in the middle of the Quad, we sat on the carpet that once covered your dorm room floor. We talked about the past year, the summer to come, and the fate of our friendship. It was the only time I had ever seen stars in Missouri.

III

The stars were bright enough to
find my way around the outside
of the vacant house. The acreage
was overgrown with tall weeds
and thistle, but they did not
stop me from peering into the
windows of a former life.

The garage where I kissed my
first boyfriend. The garden
where my father hid his alcoholism.
The office where my mother
worked herself into a divorce.
And my room.

IV

Even though there was a full lunar
eclipse, the stars filled the sky.
I sat between mom and dad in the
driveway on the warm summer pavement
and we took turns picking out constellations.

V

Enamored.

After the Republican National Convention

by David Gross

Sitting quietly, smoking a joint in my living room
I'm watching Phyllis Schlafly on late-night CNN.
Straight-backed and vaporous, in a Nancy Reagan sort of way,
she looks like all the country club mothers
who ran the junior high cotillion my parents made me attend.

Listening to her expound on Republican policies of hatred and
fear,
only mildly disguised as white bread, picket-fenced correctness,
I get some satisfaction out of the fact that I'm very stoned,
and I laugh to myself as I blow smoke at the t.v.

But I stop smiling when I hear this liver-spotted serpent
in June Cleaver's pearls and floral print dress
telling me who I should or should not have sex with,
what my girlfriend/ wife/ mother/ sister
may or may not do with her body,
who deserves what and who doesn't.
And for the first time she scares me.

She scares me like the Newsweek article
about the DEA agents who threatened to kill the gay man,
pounding their M-16s against their ceiling, his floor,
shouting "We're gonna kill you, faggot!"
I want to say, "Fuck them," because they're stupid,
and go on with my life because it doesn't affect me anyway.

Then I think about Plato
and how he called democracy the "4th best form of govern-
ment,"

how he predicted we'd kill ourselves trying to please everyone.
And I think of how Quayle said he *tries* to read the Republic
every year.

Well, he should try harder; because America, after all,
is just a thirteen-year-old girl with braces and pig-tails.

Alone in These Woods

by Sandra Crouch

Dried leaves still hang from the trees.
Their last bitter rustlings applaud me
as I lie in the choreography of their shadows in the wind.
If I close my eyes I can hear the pond ice melting.
Alone in these woods in an unexpected January sun,
my body sinks further into the cool damp of the ground
and I can smell the moistness, the familiar life smell of dirt.
For a moment I'm a little girl again, playing alone in the weeds.
Or with you, Elizabeth, remember when we would play?
Crouched between the car and the rosebush that never bloomed,
I would sit on the edge of the driveway, weeds pushing up
through concrete
like the stubborn breasts beneath our shirts.
And you would dance, Elizabeth, dance like these shadows
surrounding me now as I sprawl on these weeds in the sun,
hair dangling and mixing with leaves in their winter skins
of ochre and cream, and the sun on closed eyelids
in the middle of January, in these woods, alone.

About That Time

by Liz Blackwell

About that time when I was six
Sitting with skinny brown legs dangling
Over the edge of the greying porch swing -- midafternoon
In the summer, on the farm.

About how I was feeling then with my little body
Hands crammed down into my denim pockets
Wishing that Jack and Katie weren't playing down the road,
or that they had asked me to go along, wishing
That I wasn't such a baby, wasn't crying, wishing that
My lungs would stop jerking against my thin
White T-shirt, and wishing I could run
Far, far away and never come back -- then they'd be sorry.

About that time you saw me there when I was six,
And left your gardening, straightening your
Muscled, tan back, walking across the just-cut grass
of farmhouse lawn. About how you brought over
A little turtle you had found, his smooth, bumpy,
Hard, warm shell, and said to me,
"Hon, I found this little guy by himself in the rhubarb
of all places. I think maybe he could use a friend; would
You mind taking care of him for awhile so I can finish up?"
About how you put him in my dirty short fingers, and
How we played, he and I, until supper-time.

About that time when I was seventeen, and we argued
About Jason and me going to the lake by ourselves,
And I stormed outside and through the lately plowed fields,
And I saw a whitened shell, half-covered by a clump
Of grass, and turned around and walked home. About how
I sat down on the sofa beside you to watch MASH on TV.
And how I realized what you must have known back then,
Back when I was six, and you were gardening.

And it is about this time, when I am twenty-two
With my denim legs curled up under me, a little scared,
In a dorm room this time, thinking
About the future, about love and sex, and the things
That we are doing here, missing six year-old trouble,
About how my back is against a hard beige wall, and you
Are not gardening anymore. About this time and
How I am wondering what you must know, this time.



Photo by Jay Kish

Court

by Wayne Zade

Fulton Municipal Court
Judgements Oct. 19
Judge Sam Port

*Francis L. Mussman, 46, of 296 W. 15th St., Fulton, fined \$25 for following too close.

What was he trying to see, leaning forward over the steering wheel, scanning the back of the car ahead for someone he knew, to pass, blow the horn and wave at? Or was he craning his neck, trying to make out a bumper sticker? After the accident, standing on the roadside and waiting for the police to come, he could have read the sticker plainly: I LIKE MY WIFE, BUT I LOVE MY TRUCK.

*Mary Ann Jorgenson, 35, of 304 J Hilltop Drive, fined \$25 for failure to restrain a dog.

The dog was huge and had a mind of its own, knew exactly where it wanted to go in life, and wouldn't let anything stand in its way. This dog was ruthless, and all she could do was hang on the leash for dear life and try to enjoy the ride as the dog pulled farther and farther ahead of a pack only it could imagine.

*Jerry O. Clark, 28, of Route 1, Steedman, fined \$10 for driving with a child without proper child restraint.

The kid was all over the place, climbing into the back seat, bouncing up and down, pressing his chubby little hands and face against the windshield, making fishlike shapes. He had a mouth on him like you wouldn't believe.

* * * * *

INCIDENT

*A Columbia man, 19, reported that someone had thrown a table out of window, striking and breaking his arm Oct. 1.

I'm sorry. Actually, I was aiming at the new Honda Civic del Sol next to where you were standing. Forgive me. It was an accident!

Season

by Trisha Howard

Standing in the bright still morning
watching the men carve trophies out of beast
she reminisces fresh red pools of dirty red water
washed down from skinning and gutting and
cleaning

The ancient-sacred rite of manhood manifest in carnage
began this morning, with glow-orange jackets
a six-pack to dull defenses, numb the senses
to the necessary slaying and the necessary splaying
of still-warm deer flesh

She thought, my lover once said to me of our mutual addiction
(to one another? to our lifestyle? to fight and
conquest?)
*I am the Jack to your Daniels, the peach to your
schnapps, the hangover to your buzz.*

She thought she should have replied,
*I'm no alcoholic, and I won't need Betty Ford to free
myself from you*

But she stayed quiet and stayed

Standing under cloudless gray autumn morning sky
watching, fascinated, the process of cut, strip, hang
she views sparkling blood on bone, glinting sun in
dead eyes, catching death in the dazzling array of
glimmer Proudly, the stranger declared *That's mine,
eight-point buck, shot at sunrise this first day of season*

The grandson aside: *I carried that buck up the ridge to the car,
all of him. I know his weight in aches and pains.
All the while, Granddad and his two buddies chatted
about the next one. The entire time, I'm thinking,
god, let me get rid of this one first.*

She thought, I loved him, I loved him and he left me then
came back. He begged *I can't live without you.*

She thought she should have replied,
So what? I can't live with you.

She stayed quiet one last day.

In mid-November rising afternoon sun the breezy air
blows heavy, tarred with smell and sound
—the salty sweat, the brutish blood, the boozy
breath
—the hunters in glory cry out their fames and for
tunes
—and she, the outsider, turns to go.

She hid away her heart from him, even after he returned.
And her experience lent metaphor to her mind
And she said *They leave the reddened pelts, the
sawed off horns in monstrous piles.*
She said *The piles, unclaimed, are garbage sent
away.*
She said *You took me off like so much unwanted fur.*
She said *Upon returning, you found nothing
you deserved nothing
there was nothing but blood
ied water and smell of gutted
animal.*

*And you cried for warmth and comfort
And still they will not come.*

Having not stayed quiet, she could no longer stay—
She gutted her prey and left.

Visions Of A Deadman's Nightmare

by Matt Middlestetter

This figure I see
he observes me;
sitting on the pole
silent and still,
as the thunderclouds drift by.
No one else sees
and he *knows* it!
Crouching on the pole,
observant eyes.
I turn and,
like a draft of wind,
he dashes by
silent and swift.
Now perched in a tree
red beams pierce my soul
and pass on through...
Gone for now
No one sees
He will return
to observe again

Reality Check

by Dorothy Saunders

It was a dream that could wake anyone from the deadest of sleeps. You look around you to make sure what you just saw was not real. We've all had them at one time or another, the dream of falling to your death. What puzzles me is that we dream about what it would feel like to fall from a tall building, and for some reason we think that we know just how it would feel; like we did it on a daily basis. In our dreams we can feel the wind on our face, and the knot in our stomach as we are falling. "They" say that if you don't wake yourself up before you fall you will die from your own dream. What if one time I just wanted to look around, and before I knew it I was meeting concrete? And how do "they" know anyway that you will die if you don't wake yourself up?

"I heard the cause of death was a dream, what a horrible way to go. I had an uncle go the same way."
Well, for now, I'll try not to lose too much sleep over it.

To the Store

by Mark Sobolik

The day before yesterday I went to the convenience store for cigarettes.

Prior to that trip I had been entertaining my parents and hadn't smoked nearly a week. I rarely missed the tobacco; when I did, I took a nap. But then they were gone and I was sitting still, breathing normally, not sleepy, and I was suddenly compelled to walk to the convenience store for cigarettes. That's what I had really missed; walking to the store. I put on a soft sweater and my favorite shoes and my coat and walked down to the corner and enjoyed the snowdrifts I had to walk through on the way to the convenience store. I enjoyed the walk so much, I almost wished I lived further from the store.

I especially enjoyed walking into the convenience store and avoiding eye-contact with the angry woman who works there every evening who always says "What!" when someone walks in and the door goes ding-ding.

I was so glad to be in the store again that I decided to extend the exchange with the woman by buying something besides just cigarettes. I walked down the aisle where all the candy is but I don't like candy so I chose a small bag of peanuts. I tossed the bag of peanuts on the counter and stared at the beer-advertisement clock above the woman's head waiting for her to say "Is that it?" Convenience store clerks always have to say that, I guess, because so much of the store's inventory is kept behind the counter. I assume they're all instructed to say that before ringing up a purchase to encourage sales of lottery tickets and adult magazines. But this woman says it different. Really puts you on the defensive.

"Is that it?" she snapped.

I didn't say anything, but reached over to the display of generic cigarettes and grabbed two packs of Ultra Lights, tossing them just past the peanuts.

"Is that it?"

"No, Wait." I picked up the cigarettes. Do you have those in cartons?"

I was getting carried away. It had been such a long time away from the convenience store.

"Thirteen-eighty-five," she said. "Is that it?"

"And the peanuts."

She pounded on some keys on the cash register. "Fourteen-fifty-four. Is that it?"

"Do you have any matches?"

She sighed and reached under the counter and set one book of matches, advertising something in very small print that you had to send away for, on top of my carton of cigarettes. I set down a twenty dollar bill and the cash register told her how much change to give me.

I said, "Talk to you later," and I enjoyed the ding-ding the door made as I left. I opened the carton and removed cellophane and foil from a pack and then enjoyed going back into the store to use the trash can. Ding-ding.

I won't be going back to the store for several days, since I bought a whole carton of cigarettes. I haven't even eaten the peanuts. I've been smoking very heavily. I enjoyed that trip to the convenience store and I'm looking forward to using up all these packs of cigarettes so I can go back. I'm not really enjoying the cigarettes. I mostly enjoyed lighting that first one in the store. I have to smoke six more packs before I go back. When the mail came today, I went down to the mailbox and offered the letter carrier a cigarette. He said thanks and handed me my mail. I asked him for a light. I'll give him another cigarette again tomorrow. I wonder if he likes peanuts.

The Reflections From a Matchbook

by Steve Tanner

Its gilded ivory cardboard gloss
Deflects a stint of light
Off white teeth
Smiling with fond memories
of last night
In 1947
At the Hotel Majestic

The hip vibes of the
Thump thumping bass
Bounce in between
Soft snare ruffles
A lone bird
Flying
In and out
With brassy meandering hum
Wine glasses clank clanking
In time
With curved space joining
Applause
The drunken hummingbird
Zig zags back

Circling around the nest
Cigarette incense flowing with
Careless ease
Against the antique luster of the
Brass and wood quartet
Grooving with nodding heads
Snap snap foot tap
Blond hair bobbed
Long elegant
Working girl legs
Lipstick
Serving the brandy red

Loosened ties
Afterhours sighs



Photo by Dan Beckley

Mist Before the Peaks

by Steve Tanner

Hitch hiked a thousand
miles and brought
You wine

I.

J.K.

On the Westward path
underfoot
going nowhere marked
my companion grows weary
knows exactly
how far it is
to the next sad hotel
along the highway
beyond the gushing spring
nestled against a roadside
graveyard

I separate
from his tiresome company
and hitch hike through the forest
digging what lies ahead
just over the sloping hills
somewhere
advertised by question mark billboards
of all shapes
sizes
colors
but the journey There
is its own
reward

the song splash
taste
of sweet crystalline water
bubbles
from a gaping wound
in carved limestone
standing in a row
of gray headstones
watching well-fed daisies
push up from the
soft earthen bed
giving birth to the
mist of dawn
trapped too long in the
trunk
of a car without windows
plummeting towards the finish line
against the charcoal sky
well within reach
a safe
successful embrace
from shifty eyed
skyscrapers
of cold cement.

II.

Isn't it strange
to see yourself
three lifetimes down the same
sad highway
but not really getting far
enough away
just sitting on ragged
imitation leather baggage
thumbing for a ride

to the next lonely diner
of black and white and gray
where nothing really changes

old reruns on the technicolor
television screen
revolutionary mad spirits
ablaze
at the steering wheel
hair blown
cruising through
winding hills
with a destiny
around every bend
untouched
a liquid ruby
sunrise
straight ahead

the sky bleeding
nectar from
the deep rooted tree
abundant
with ripe fruit.

(For Jack Kerouac
and Neal Cassady)



Photo by Joel Hopper

How I Feel

by Mike Hargett

I've probably tried a thousand times
To tell you how I feel,
But when I see you my lips close tight
And they will not break their seal,

Like a blind man seeing his first color
The joy in every red, green, and blue,
I tell you truthfully he knows nothing
Of the joy I feel when I see you.

How do I speak of the love in my heart
When there are no words that will do,
How do I describe perfection
Likewise I cannot describe you.

I Wrote You A Poem

by Mike Hargett

I wrote you a poem, the words fit perfectly,
Though I could have made it longer
But I made you the key,
So Keats could have written none better,

I wrote you a love song, the notes fit naturally,
Though I still have more to tell
Thinking of you struck a chord in me,
So Mozart couldn't have done so well,

I wrote you a fairy tale, it gets better by the line,
Although just short of great it fell
All I did was picture you in my mind,
Mother Goose has no greater tale to tell,

I wrote you a play, it worked out great,
And still there is more to tell
I think of you and the words won't wait,
Shakespeare could say it no better way,

I wrote of my love, it worked out just fine,
This time I've got it down pat
I thought of your smile and your face so divine,
who can top a subject like that?

The Voyeur

by Tonya Smith

There you are again,
sitting in your tree
watching me undress
Cheeks moving
feverishly chewing
Paws together like
some evangelist on
channel 12 that is
Praying for my soul
The dirty old man
that watches
Nymphets in the mall
every Saturday, has
Nothing on you.
The last time you
dropped in
I opened my window
and screamed, "You
are a squirrel and
I am a human. What
the hell are You
looking at?"
You just
waved
and went back
into your little hole
to write a poem
that I couldn't
think of.

Pariah of the Fraternity Dumpsters

by Chad Cumming

Andy and I carried garbage bags
out to the dumpster and there he was-
a short, dark man with a mustache
that made him resemble Charlie Chaplin.
He made ends meet by rooting our beer cans
from out of the dumpster
and cashing them in.
As we awkwardly handed him our bags,
my companion Andy-
either less sensitive
or more brave than myself-
asked him why he lived that way.
"My wife left me,"
he answered quietly.
"She left me with nothing,
and this is all I can do to get by."
We both then resolved to help
this poor man any way we could.
When we had returned to the kitchen,
Joanne asked us from her bubbling pots
What had taken us so long.
We explained that we'd been helping
the "dumpster diver" with the orange van
find cans in our garbage
and she snorted with disgust.
"He is worthless trash," she snarled
punctuating her statement
with a loud bang of her spoon.
We defended the man indignantly,
reminding Joanne of his devastating loss
but she whirled from the stove and said

"Oh yeah, his wife left him all right,
but that girl left him
while he was in prison
for raping their daughter . . ."
And she continued her tirade
I grew cold and looked at my hands
that were stained with the smell
of his sentence.
At the next pledge class meeting,
Andy suggested we save the cans
we collected on mornings after parties,
cash them in,
and put the money toward a worthy cause
like a keg at "the pines."
Although everyone was laughing,
Andy and I looked at one another
with jurors' eyes.



Photo by Joel Hopper

Reading Whitman in the Texaco

by Chad Cumming

While waiting for the mechanics
at S&K Automotive
to put new brake pads on my car,
I pulled out Walt Whitman: Selected Poems
which I had bought that morning.
While my eyes lept with Whitman's verse,
my nose tried to ignore the smell
of old motor oil and generic cigarettes
and my ears filtered out
belches, mediocre dirty jokes,
and country music from a radio
that needed the tuning knob adjusted badly.
I was hunched toward the pages
when a voice disturbed me.
"Boy, what the hell r you readin there?"
asked a man with stubble and tremendous gut.
"Poetry."
"Poetry?" he said with a perplexed frown
as though I'd told him
I was going to breed ferrets
there beside the cash register.
"Yes, Whitman," I explained
and nodded cheerfully.
He turned and walked back into the garage
shaking his head sadly
and I dove back into my book.

To Students of English 104, the Last Short Term

by Margot McMillen

Willing hostages, we have arrived.
The college van, tedious and dangerous,
the name of our safe school on its side,
has rolled with your jokes and music. We disembark
at a desolate place, to sit by this fragile lake.

This is not what I expected. I thought we'd see
red -tipped blackberry canes with white blossoms,
yellow grass and something purple blooming.
(Someone has burned the park. Tufts of grass
push up from a few dark clods) and here we are.
Reading over books and papers in this charred setting,

Each of us proceeding in a day that seems arranged,
genetic like green eyes or allergy to cats.
How like yourselves you are. Ed has taken off his shoes.
"Green leaves like eager spikes aim for the sun," he writes.

Philip stands, hating the dirt. He worries to his page
about the clouds, "Ominous. God's farts."
Judy is distracted, examining her legs, so lost
in smooth skin and worried about stubble she cannot think.

Jana scoots away and Richard lifts a bug impaled on his
ball point pen. Angelo (try to touch him) sits on a large rock.
He scans us all and writes, "We will leave this place
in twenty minutes, confident it will be here when we return.

In one or two places, I observe, bundles of broad leaves
try to get a start.

Signs From You

by Vince Clervi

While traveling through the wind,
I stop and notice the world.
Only to behold a wondrous sight
that can only be seen now with shut eyes.
When the world stopped,
I stepped off into a shadowy pit.
Feeling the soft warm mud underneath,
I taste the dampness of despair.
Climbing out, hoping to make it,
for I don't want to miss this chance.
I just might escape
if only I can cross the Barrier.
When finally free
the path seems clear.
Knowing to take the long and difficult,
I wonder if it's worth it.
Time moves by so slowly
that when we reach the end,
the world has already moved on.
Counting my numbers and seeing the stars,
I search for the light.
Send me a signal
that I may rescue you.
A flash of light appears
on the leafy trees over head.
They blow furiously as if shaking their heads
to warn me not to proceed.
When suddenly you appear,
wearing only a long white robe.
Asking me forward with your subtle hand motions,
as if nothing needs to be said.

Holding onto your hand,
feeling the soft delicate flesh,
my pulse starts to synchronize with yours.
I hope this sign is sent from you,
telling me that this is the way.
I want to live in the promised land,
will you sow the seeds with me?



Photo by Joel Hopper

Fear of Falling

by Anne Zimmerman

I ran through meadows hand in hand
And crossed oceans fearlessly,
Darkest nights,
Fiercest storms
Were no obstacles for love's race.

Stars passed endlessly
The higher we climbed
Only to stare haughtily,
Blazing as I fell.

Broken with pain,
I waited for strength to reclaim me.
Then began a new journey -
So difficult at first for tired,
Forgotten limbs
Fearing another fall.

Finally

by Ann Zimmerman

and finally words fell meaningless
(only nonsense - frightened birds scattering aimlessly)
then I felt you start to open
like so many silver roses
and your soul began to sing
like the rain
crescendo crescendo
drop to
heartbeat
leaving me teary-eyed and
breathless.

Like The Weather (for Baby Stephen)

by Tonya Smith

A red leaf
set on fire
nature's seasonal kiss
is weaned by it's mother
and sent spiraling
back to earth.
I pick it up
as an October
novelty
that reminds me
of Chick Corea playing
"The Great Pumpkin Waltz,"
and carry it in my
Cupped hands.

Gradually the leaf
turned into a poem.
And when Steve came over
that evening to view my work
he said, "I tried to write
about a leaf once, but
I couldn't so it. So, I
just taped it to my notebook."
And I said, "Damn it
Steve, that is why you
should be a poet
and not a philosopher."

Five Minutes in My Head.....

by Sandra Crouch

I am too afraid to slow down.
To slow would allow me to think, to feel,
and that I could not handle. Well, I could handle it --
much as I've handled all that's come before, but
tissue does not heal as well the second time it's cut.
And so I dart about and throw myself into superficialities and I
avoid

I don't know where these poems come from.
I sit and they come out from somewhere that has a lot of pain.
"That can't be me," I think -- I don't feel all that.
I can't, I don't have time. I don't have the strength.

I wonder how much of what I'm writing here
looks like the person writing it.
How much am I warping the mirror for this audience?
Or am I truly standing there exposed, and if I am
why don't I dance this naked waltz more often?

Other people placed a bow on my head
and a phone in my hand and named me.
I frequent that image often -- it's comfortable, it's easy.
But that is not where the "I" lives.
I wish I knew that address -- I don't,
but shouldn't I have it memorized already?

Hiding from something makes it difficult to find.
OK, so you find it -- what if you don't like what you see?

Life should have a rewind button.
Mistakes would not burn so much if you could erase them.
Oh, you should have to make them, realize them, apologize for
them, squirm a bit about them, but then they should disappear.

I solved someone else's life last night. It's my job.
If only I held the perfect questions for finding the answers to
MY life.

And look, I can't even write a coherent paragraph.
I have so many ideas I cannot catch just one in my pen.
And why the hell did I major in business?



Photo by Jay Kish

Pops

by Abby Jacob

There you stand,
looking at me
with that lost expression—
trying to figure out
who this 20-year-old woman is
that captured your little girl.
Peering at me with those
deep
 deep
 clear blue eyes—
wondering where the time went,
how I grew up without your knowing.
Those eyes—searching for your angel
who would stay awake until 1:00 a.m.
to pretend she was asleep
when you came in
to gaze at your creation
and kiss her
 good-night
after long hours during tax season.
You—searching for your little helper
who would diligently hand you
hammer
 nails
 screwdriver,
Searching for your Hotshot
balancing on the top
of the jungle-gym set
never afraid
with you there
to catch her.

There you stand
looking at me
as if you don't know me.
That woman
whose views differ
from yours.
That woman
who has
her own mind.
That woman
who wants to
do things
without you
there to catch her.
You think,
in that logical CPA way,
that I don't need you any more.
But, like the time you
threatened to take me
to an orphanage to
shut my sassy mouth,
You are wrong.

Brother Boy

by Liz Blackwell

You've drained the bottle half-empty.
Around the peeling label—I see
Your hand wound like a snake around there,
And I turn away. And I hide my stare.

The bottle-mouth yawning open pleads
For your stupored kiss and darker deeds.
You go wildly, open-mouthed down,
Your drunken lips, Pleasures found.

I'm pulled to push your mouth aside
From a wet substitute for love denied.
But you frantically cling to brown-bottle curves,
Sucking down numbness you think you deserve.

And I know she's just your easy-got lady,
Her love potent enough that you go crazy.
Still, I cry when you—sprawled on the bed,
Fall asleep with her between your legs.

For A Cousin

by Liz Blackwell

Sweet cousin-girl, I am writing this
While you are sitting bound-up,
In a sterile, a state, hospital
With your arms tied behind your back.

Oh God can you remember?
Am I crazy? Can you remember
Grape Nehi a la mode?
It was always more than ice-cream soda
At Grandma's house.

Can you remember us laughing at,
Laughing to hide, our obviously
Secret conspiracy to forget
Our nine PM summer bedtime?
Sweet cousin can you remember?

Westminster College General Psych 101,
I know, i know. Memory is selective.
Do you remember a later scene,
With different cues for
This present act?

It was part of the play too, I
Understand that, that
Other day on the farm ten years ago.
We went down in the valley with
My uncle, your Dad.

I too am seeing the anger flash again.
I watch him knocking you
Down, and again down with a broken stick,
And curse you up again, and
Scream at you to "run, stupid."

You are falling and rising,
And falling and rising.

There is a scene missing here. I have
Screwed my eyes shut against this,
What is happening to you, Sweet cousin-girl.
I open at your scream.

He is running and you stand
With your scream shaking you.
I am watching the red snake down
Your throbbing forehead, under your
Small glasses-frame.

Reading Through a Saturday

by Scott Pitcock

If it's going to come to so much reading on a Saturday, let me awake on a cool, damp autumn afternoon. Let there be a package of instant oat meal and some coffee and a few cigarettes. Let me ease into the pages; let me hear Bird so "Blues for Alice" or "Ko-Ko." Sure, the phone's likely to ring, but who says I have to worry about this before it even happens? I'm ready to read here on this couch for a good three hours. To let the early evening steal in quickly, its quiet colors all blending into a darkness. I'm ready to go for as long as the rain goes. (You had jokingly asked how I stand it, my living here without a television. But look, could I pull a day like this off if I did have one?) Let two a.m. roll around. Public Radio's "Jazz After Hours," of course I'll have taken some breaks to write and eat and maybe nap, but so much of this reading will be history! I'll have spun off on some other book, or a magazine, by that time, probably, but I'll have done so much by then! Hell, I hope you do call, after all. Even if you're drunk and even if he's still over there, I hope you do call. After a day like this one, and after reading my way through it, I'll be as ready to tell you what's gone wrong as I could ever be.

Sequence?

by Sandra Crouch

I

I wonder what a psychologist would say
about my notebook scribbles
the state of my subconscious slipping through
like holograms, one image at a time
curving intricately into another
with a slow swirl o wrist and ink,
and always scribbles of
my name my name my name
written in twenty different forms of verse,
and endless search for the shape that I will take.

II

What color
does a chameleon turn
when it stands upon
a mirror?

III

Sometimes
I feel full of false tragedy
But then,
You know what they say about paper cuts.

IV

I lie there
looking up
at the pinprick holes
in my ceiling tile,
like so many stars in the sky
without a constellation to be found.

V

People often ask me how it's going
and I say
"Faster than I am."

VI

So many times our thoughts are poems
but
come
out
words.

VII

"My feet are freezing!"
I exclaimed to the phone
in the middle of the story
about your mother's interference
"Put on some socks," you said,
mumbling about my lack of common sense.
"I can't," I whimpered,
"I just painted my toenails."

Stacy

by Abby Jacob

You once told me I could fly,
and I believed you.
There I was jumping off the balcony
with my blankie around my neck.
For four years I told everyone that I met
that I could fly,
and I truly believed it.

Mom said you also
taught me how to talk—
saying “NO!” “NO!” over and over
until I could finally say “Stacy.”
You made up an imaginary friend
for me named “Bibby”
she was “Carson’s” sister,
your imaginary friend—
they were the mirror people,
they looked just like us.

You taught me how to color in the lines,
read write, and sing all the words
to Captain and Tennille’s Greatest Hits.
You taught me how to curl my hair
and put on make-up.
For two years, you planned every outfit I wore.

It was you, not Mom, who was there
when I first started my period,
and you taught me the fine art
of inserting a tampon,
so I could go swimming.
You told me all about sex, the good parts,
not that clinical stuff Mom told me.

You also threw a knife at me,
burned me with a curling iron,
and teased me when your friends were there.
I still worshipped you.

And then you left me,
for college,
taking half my closet,
all the shampoo, razors, and pads
with you.

Today you call me—
asking my advice about
what you should do
with your life.
For once, I get to tell you
that you can do anything,
that you are special—
and stand firm
while you
lean on me
and try to fly.

Tolstoy

by Sandra Crouch

I read today that a Tolstoy died while waiting
far a train. He died sitting in a train station,
on his way to some far away Russian winter.
He was out to find God, as I see it, His God. Exiled
by a restlessness. He was heading for a cold
church of stone where the snow comes
down constantly but never too quickly;
Where translucent air in any of the dark
rooms has a music to it. Where men, some
in hoods, generally nod at one another when
faced with such burdens as communication,
or thirst, or the situation of awaiting some-
thing. Where men break bread and drop to
their knees upon brown stony floors
of cold, hard dust, awaiting the arrival
of something mobile, something to come.
This is where Tolstoy was headed when his
name came up; this is what he was after,
that last afternoon in Russia. As I see it.

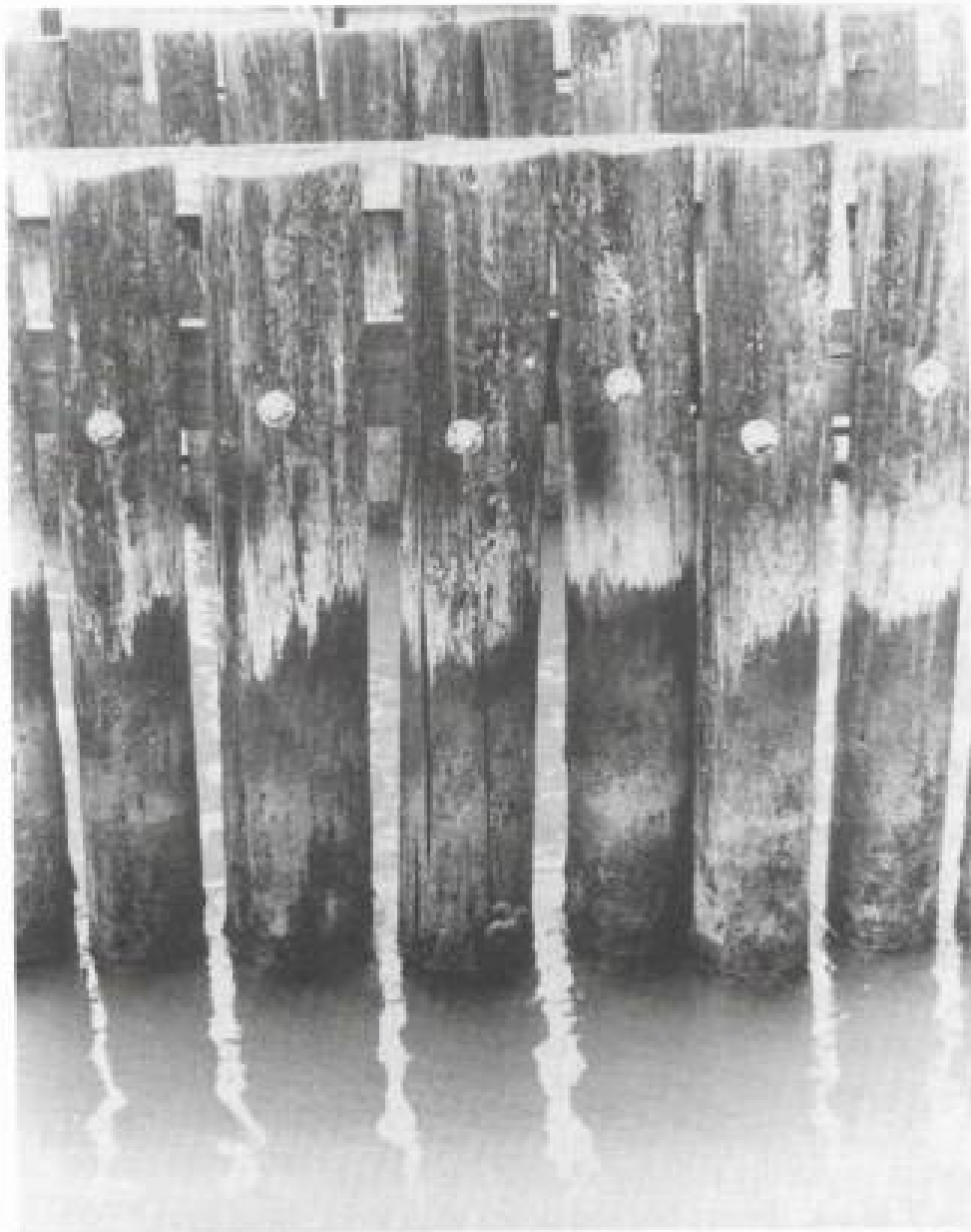


Photo by Dan Beckley

Baseball, Christmas, and Cigarettes

by David Gross

I was meeting my father in a hotel lounge near the airport. He called to say he was on his way out West on business and wanted to get together for a while. I hadn't seen him in almost a year so I pulled into St. Louis I was pretty excited.

I arrived at the hotel early, and after ordering a beer I sat back and thought of him. I thought back to those sunny summer afternoons when we'd play catch in the backyard until it was too dark to see the ball. The grass was freshly cut, and the late afternoon hours brought a steady wind filtering through the trees. I could see him there, lumbering across the lawn, lifting his arm up high to snag the ball in his mitt and losing his cigarette in the process.

"Let's see the curve, champ," he'd bellow out, pounding his strong, bellow out, his strong, fist into the glove. I'd give it my best shot, and the ball would drop out of sight, careening under his outstretched arm and rattling against the chain-link fence.

I finished the beer and had just lit up a cigarette when I saw him come into the bar. As he came closer to the table I noticed the extra pounds and the subtle gray hairs around his temples. He wore his standard grey pin-stripe suit and black wingtips. Under his arm was the brown leather briefcase I had given him for Father's Day years ago.

"Hey there, champ!" He called out as I rose to greet him. We sat down at the bar and ordered me another beer and a scotch and water for himself.

"So, how the hell are ya?" He asked, slipping his drink and absent-mindedly looking around the lounge.

"I'm o.k. Pretty bogged down with work these days."

"You see the game last night?" he asked. "That Elway's

somethin' else." He'd already finished his drink and began to look around nervously again. I could tell he'd already had a few.

"Dad, is something wrong?"

His face sobered up and he looked me straight in the eye. I noticed for the first time the two day's growth of beard and the bags under his eyes.

"Son, your mom and I are getting a divorce."

His eyes fell and the corners of his mouth turned down sharply. It was the same look he'd put on years ago when he had to go away on business and miss a ball game.

"What happened?"

"It's just one of those things, son."

"Just one of those things! You've been married for twenty-five years, Dad!"

"I know, I know!"

"Jesus, Dad."

"It's all my fault," he said, lowering his head down onto the bar and cradling his arms around the scotch and water. Stunned, I stared at my reflection in the mirror behind the bar. I thought of my mother and all her years of devotion—putting up with his drinking, taking care of me and my sister with never a thought for her own self-interest.

"Is there someone else?" I asked, and I could tell the answer from the look on his face.

"Son, I'm sorry."

He was crying now, but I didn't want to hear the rest. I left the bar without another word. I didn't want to be around anyone.

It was raining outside, and as I ran out to the car the cold December air made the raindrops feel like tiny pieces of ice pounding on my face. Driving home on I-70, my thoughts again turned back to childhood. Christmas Eve. I was six years old, couldn't sleep and desperately wanted to get a peek a Santa Claus. I crept out of my bed and snuck down the hallway

towards the living room. Hearing someone rustling about, I inched my way in between the bar and the staircase. Peeking around the corner, I saw a figure lurking in the shadows given off by the glow of the fireplace. As he turned to the side I recognized the profile of my father, hurriedly placing gifts around the tree. After that, I went back to bed and immediately fell asleep.

A week later I was home for Christmas break. Mom was going through the motions. Cleaning the house. Shopping. Cooking. Anything to keep her mind off the divorce. Ever since I could remember, we had always spent Christmas together as a family. Dad had returned from Denver a few days ago, but we hadn't heard from him. Leaving my sister to deal with the situation, I spent most of my nights over at Maureen's place. She worked as a receptionist for Dad's firm. She was twenty-eight, six years older than I, and we had been sleeping together off and on for the past couple of years.

Maureen's apartment was an expensive place and well-furnished. I had been over at her place ever since I had heard about the divorce, and she turned out to be a welcome diversion. The night before Christmas Eve she made dinner for me. I arrived at her place around eight. She opened the door wearing a black-mini skirt and a white blouse. Her skin was soft and tan and the mini-skirt showed off her long legs. After a couple of drinks we decided to skip dinner and head straight for the bedroom.

Afterwards, we lay in bed for a long time in silence, smoking. Maureen said she wanted to take a shower, so I get dressed and went into the living room to make myself a drink. The apartment was furnished in some kind of post-modern style that I really hated. There were lots of mirrors and vases with these long, colored sticks protruding out of them. I remembered how Maureen once told me they cost something like sixty dollars a piece. Sixty bucks for a vase full of sticks.

I had just settled down to look at a magazine when I realized I'd left my cigarettes in the bedroom. Maureen was already in the shower and I couldn't find my smokes anywhere.

"Hey Maureen!" I shouted over the noise of the shower, "Did you see my cigarettes anywhere?"

"What?"

"My cigarettes!"

"I don't know. Maybe they fell on the floor."

I looked all through the rumpled sheets on the bed and Maureen's discarded clothing, but they were nowhere in sight. I got down on my hands and knees and felt under the bed.

"Aha! Maureen must have knocked them off when she got up." I pulled out the half-empty pack of Camels, but before I got up something caught my eye. Tucked back under the bed near the wrapping paper was something with a gold buckle. I don't know why I pulled it out. Maybe it was the natural Christmas curiosity. Maybe I wanted to find out what was under the bed of this woman I'd been sleeping with who owned sixty-dollar vases full of colored sticks. What I pulled out from under the bed made me wish I'd never started smoking, never slept with any girls, and never even had a father. There, under her bed, was the brown leather briefcase I had given to my father years ago.

Missouri Fable

by Jay Karr

Spring in this place can chill you to the bone.
April's the month Clay and his cousin Julie skipped
out of school and ran away one year.
You get a warm breath of the Gulf and off you go.
Nine days in ten belong to frozen slush and horizontal
rain straight down from Nome.

Sixteen they were, and everybody in this county knows.
After Clay left to tend to the herd at Emeryville, there
came four days of sleet, and soup for lunch, and the
silent phone. The first call's Caroline to say his
trucks's in front of Julie's for the third day in a row.

Turn out the lights, unplug the phone,
sheets crack like ice when you get in
Spring here's no time to learn to sleep alone.



Photo by Dan Beckley