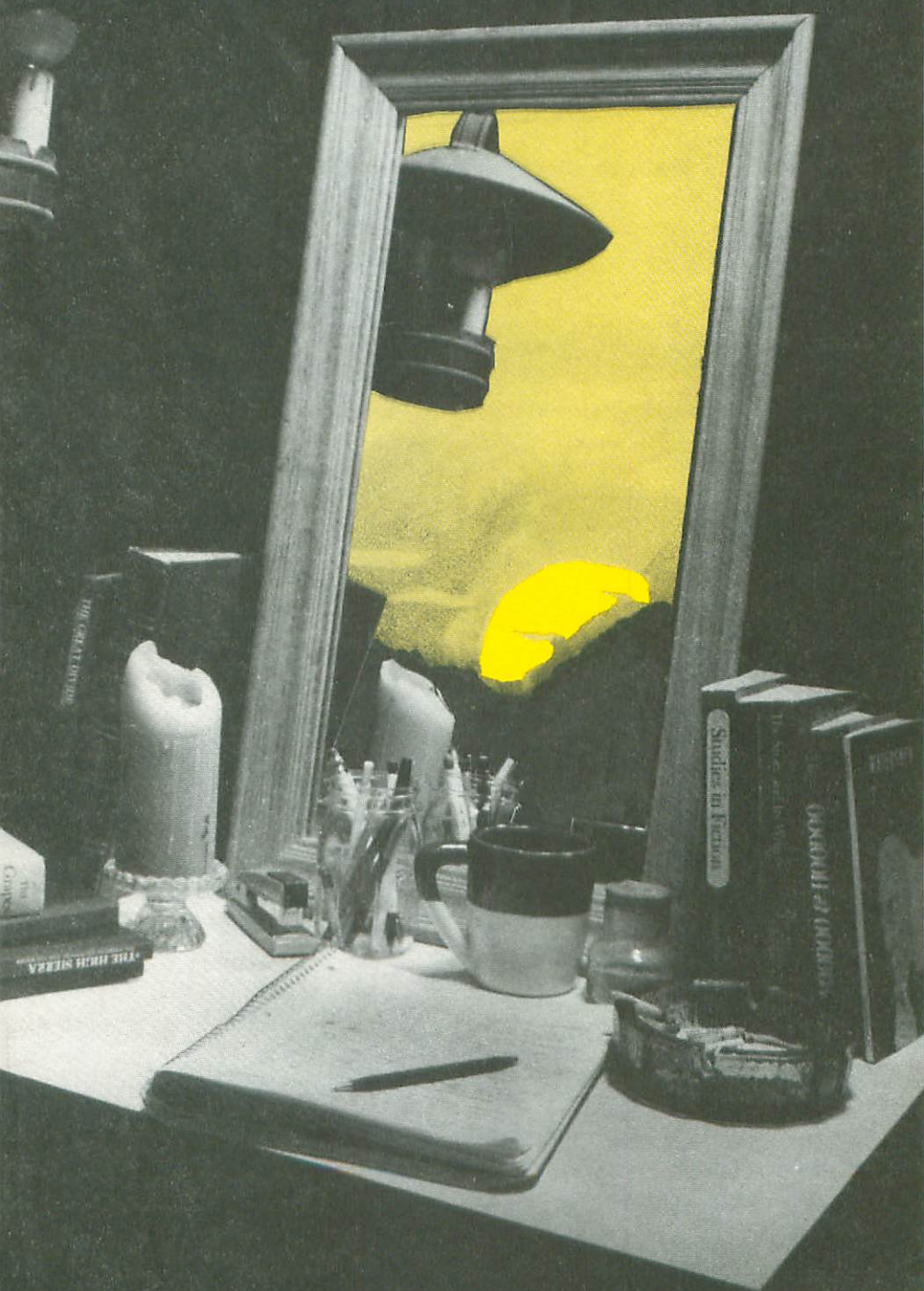


WATERSHED



WATERSHED

Volume 15, Number 1

Watershed

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"A Poem on Imperfection" and "Divided by Zero" were previously published in the Butte College *Roadrunner* 1989.

No Boundaries

Originally, "No Boundaries" wasn't a theme at all. "No Boundaries" meant "no theme." But the vagueness of the two words, "no boundaries", creates many images of doors opening, consciousness expanding, and arms opening for writers and editors alike. Some see through the boundaries of time and space and gaze over alien landscapes. Others pass through the boundaries of self, searching for the perfect vista in which to self-reflect.

It is interesting to note the progression of the themes in Watershed. A year ago, the theme was "Identity." One may encounter inner-turmoil when searching for one's identity, which brings us to last spring's theme, "Conflict." The theme was appropriate for the global conflict of the time. Conflict is always associated with the crossing of boundaries, be they social, economic, or political. In order to find one's identity, one must struggle with the inner-conflicts associated with crossing the boundaries of self. Which leads us to the theme for the fall edition, "No Boundaries."

Watershed is a concentration of many efforts. We would like to extend our thanks to those who contributed to this issue. Without you, the artists, this literary magazine would not be possible.

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LOVING THE KILLER
for Anne Sexton
— Diane E. Imhoff

Loving the Killer
was bad business.

It was like
feeding yourself
almost fatal doses
of cyanide
in your Cherrios.

It was like
swimming in
dark lakes
until your lungs
exploded
and then coming up for
precious little air
and going down again.

It was like
eating too many Tums,
carrying razor blades
for rainy days,
begging for open
heart surgery
every Saturday
at 7pm
and hanging
at weird angles
off known to be
fatal bridges.

And yet, it was
someone
to love, it was
something
to do.

Honest people smiled,
when they saw your charades
because really
everyone was doing it.

There wasn't one
lover around
who hadn't lost
something
misplaced
a part of themselves
somewhere
in this act of
trying to find
a killer
to love who didn't
kill you
completely.

we are all dogs

—*Melanie J. Smith*

we were pushed through the canal
by our mothers
and we laid on our sides and cried

the world was not what we expected
but the moment was pure
and we were animals
part zebra, part spider
part hot tail lizard
the doctors held us to the fluorescent lights
smacked us open to the air
and we soon forgot what we knew before.
this was life.

we formed a head
bobbling in the crib
staring at plastic charms
spinning above our heads
they were our first stars
the white crib railings
became our first trees
the quilted pad—
a forest bed.

the world became a place of small cubicles
each one divided into smaller rooms
until there was a universe
and we learned the names of each of them
memorized their placement on charts
graphed the distance in between
the names were truth
and truth had books and formulas and elders
on its side
the truth acted as if it was eternal
that nothing could change
dogs were not us
we were not dogs
these were things we knew

we ran amongst the trees once
we felt something old and familiar
we walked into this open living room
and suddenly wanted to eat and sleep
under this canopy for awhile
we tasted handfuls of dirt
and rolled in the leaves
our parents came to get us
scolded us for lingering in the dark.

at that stucco house that evening
the yolk fell out of the goose egg
and all thoughts about places
left unpaved without set boundaries
and road signs were erased.
we would not walk into the wood for many years
and it would never feel the same.

we are buried in our own society
a chipped and half painted statue
an ungodly reality
we are tangled in a loop
we unknowingly repeat
and we miss the trees
because we could never kiss the trees
and we are not dogs

I CAN SEE IT IN YOUR EYES

—*Tricia Lord*

Hey, there. Jump in, I'll give you a lift. You don't look like a hitchhiker. Your car break down or something? Just a sec. Lemme see inside your purse. Here, you can check out my backpack. I don't mind helping people out, but let's not be stupid. Don't trust people right off, that's what I say. Lucky you're a woman. I don't pickup men. Too dangerous. I did once, though. Kinda femme-looking kid down in San Diego. I thought he was a girl. Oh, yeah—coupla weeks ago I picked up this old man. Wasn't even thumbing. I was sitting at the stoplight and I saw the old geezer hopping along on his cane, trying to catch a bus. Almost made it, too. The bus pulled out and the driver didn't even see him. The old guy knocked his cane against the bench and cussed out loud. Really ripped my heart out y'know? Polyester pants and a flannel shirt, poor old bastard'd have to sit in 100 degree heat waiting for the next one. I gave him a lift. You never saw anybody so appreciative in your life. The guy almost cried.

My name's Nikki Stevens. Like Stevie Nicks, y'know, backwards. My sister was a big fan of hers when she was with Fleetwood Mac. I never liked her music myself—too predictable for my taste.

You into music? I work for the Record Warehouse. A really asinine name when you consider we don't even stock records anymore. Cassettes, CDs, videos. That's it.

I'm what they call a shopper. That's a spy for the company brass. I drive around to the twelve Record Warehouses and make sure employees are following policies, not ripping-off the store, things like that. I'm good at it, 'cause I use to steal myself.

My P.O.—that's probation officer—got me the job. You look surprised. Don't worry, I'm not dangerous or anything. I put in a year at Juvy when I was fifteen. Worst thing about it was I was late getting my driver's license.

And my family. Gawd. For years my Mom and my sister Shelly—she's thirty—fought over me for the AFDC. In the Hall, your parents have to pay ten bucks a day for your keep. You know that? Man my mom was pissed. Now I'm eighteen, they don't want me. But hell, I knew that all along.

So you wanna know what I did? Screwed my boyfriend. Really. He was thirty three so they could've nailed him for statutory rape, but they locked me up instead. On an infraction. I was staying at my Grandma's and she called the cops on Ron—he was my boyfriend. When the cops came, I answered the door and lied—said he wasn't there. Lying to a

cop is against the law. Hardly ever lock you up for it, though. They put me in Juvy "for my own good." Thought they were "protecting" me from him. So I went to the Hall and he got a new girlfriend. No big deal.

Looking back, it was probably the best thing that could've happened. I met this teacher at Juvy—Melanie Morgan. Kinda little and prissy, but she was real y'know? Said I reminded her of Holden Caulfield—told me he was the main character in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Hell, I knew that. I read. But I'm not like Holden at all. She probably said it because I was always calling people phony. Holden did that too.

I think I communicate pretty well. I'm a yakker, that's for sure. I talk fast, as you've probably noticed. And bite my nails. And smoke. Classically uptight. But I'm not uptight, really. Hell, I like people.

Anyway, after I got out of Juvy, I found out Ms. Morgan was a dyke. Saw her and her girlfriend walking into Francines one night—that's a lezzy bar in the City, in case you didn't know. She was so pretty and prissy it kind of surprised me. Her girlfriend was good looking, too. Just goes to show stereotypes don't mean shit.

I knew Ms. Morgan was different because she understood how us kids in there felt different, too. Labelled, y'know—cut off. And she didn't feel sorry for us one damn bit

Everybody's cut off in some way, I think. Even you. I mean, you look sort of average, but you've got something to hide. I can see it in your eyes.

Lotta losers in my family. It makes you different. And like I said, it gets to showing. The more cut off you are, the more you recognize it in other people. I noticed you right off.

CRACK

—*Amelia Barth*

Another typical day.

The couch was scratching on the dog.

A flurry of blue snow fell in the living room,

As three kumquats sang the arioso from *La Traviata*.

(The gerbil wanted to hear Bruce Springsteen,

So they put him in the blender.)

Glog the caveman sat in the kitchen,

Sipping his third Bud Lite.

Suddenly, the tranquility of this quiet scene was shattered,

As the goldfish screamed in anguish,

"Who ate my chutney?!"

Suspicion dropped like a dark cloud.

CRUISIN '

—Brett Harvey

It started the same as most of those nights, when I used to go out alone... "cruisin'." Well not really cruisin', just plain driving. From ten or eleven at night clear into the morning. Sometimes 'til four or five in the morning I'd stay out. I guess I figured it would be better to be out, looking, as long as I was going to be awake. Better than lying in bed with my feet sweating and my brain rambling through all the things that weren't right 'til my stomach burned...or watching t.v. There's a solution to the world's problems. Let me tell you. Just plug 'em in and turn 'em off. Funny thing about late-night programming is that it's geared toward the kind of crazy people who are up at that time of night: insomniacs, speed freaks, crack heads, axe murderers. I used to turn on the t.v. some nights and flip through the channels in desperation searching for some program that would keep my mind busy, cheer me up, perhaps fill that void inside where reason for living this mundane life had mysteriously sunken away, where my joy for existence gradually slipped into the black hole which has been silently forming in my abdomen over the years, to be dissipated into a million pieces and scattered through the night air outside my window into the darkness. I guess everyone gets a little out of their mind at that time of night when everything's so still and the air has that wet greasy smell and the crickets are humming, or if there's no crickets your head supplies its own humming. Your imagination kind of runs away with you. You hear footsteps outside the window, or a dog madly barking and then suddenly yelping and then silence, as if some horribly contorted deformed man got hold of it and broke its neck. Then you turn the television on and find a movie about a woman that thinks she's a man or a man that wants to be a woman, who murders all the scantily-clothed girls in a sorority house with an ice pick, or a channel that offers all-night advertising on printed billboards accompanied by department store muzak, or a channel with the latest up-and-coming revivalist, Reverend Jerry Hope, begging for donations to build his "Temple for Jesus" in Idaho, who will most likely make it to prime-time Sunday off the proceeds from this program, and if you're not crazy or brain dead already it'll put you there. Just give it time.

So it got to the point where I wouldn't watch it any more. I just couldn't. And I couldn't go out drinking anymore. That was all right the first time around at Berkeley. That was the thing to do. Go to classes, cram your brain with facts, fill up all those brain cells, take the test or write the paper, then blow all those brain cells away. Maintain, release. Maintain, release. A kind of bulimia in a way. Binge and purge. Binge and

purge. Of course, those nights of bulimia operated on all sorts of levels. But I just couldn't do it anymore. Can't. After getting out of school and working those brainless jobs for two years, just to get money to spend on food, rent, drinking, and then to go back to work again. An endless, brainless cycle. At a certain point you begin to covet those moments of thought one might have in a day...in a week. And then drinking, drunkenness, begins to seem like such a waste, such a terrible waste of time, like watching television, such a nullifier of life. But I guess that's why people do them, television and booze, to nullify their brain to match the nullity of their lives. And now, going back to school. Why? I don't know. Maybe to find something in this life that excites me and proves that the threat of worthless existence is only in my mind. Maybe to find what's right for me now that I care, now that I see what's facing me. This...life. This world, this society and culture. A little heavy, I guess.

So anyway, it was one of those nights as usual after I had taken to going out, driving through town 'til all hours of the morning and just watching people, just...looking. I remember why I went out that night. I was thinking about something or someone; I don't know what, but I remember it was real important to me at the time. I was real animated, you know. Pacing around the house, trying to get something together. Maybe I just wanted a pizza or something, but I went to the telephone—it's around five or six, still light out—and I start going through the telephone book, just paging through looking for whatever it was, and then the next thing I know, I'm looking at my own name. And I realize I've been sitting there in the chair with my finger under my own number for at least two or three minutes, just staring blankly at my name. And the clincher is I couldn't for the life of me remember what I had been looking for.

Well, that just ate at me all night, put me on edge. Or more like off the edge, unbalanced, loss of equilibrium. I just felt light and dizzy all night. So I went to bed early (nice thing about living alone is you can go to bed whenever you want), but no go. Sweaty feet, stuffy room, felt like the bed was suffocating me. Outside, I heard the crickets calling, that fresh air beckoning. So up I got about twelve. Midnight. Put on my Levi's and oxblood turtleneck (I always wore nice clothes going out), and started driving.

Monday nights it doesn't take long for a town to look deserted. Usually by one you start to get that eerie feeling that a nuclear missile is about to hit, or an earthquake, or a legion of man-eating zombies like in "Night of the Living Dead." It's always strange to be the only car on the road, the stop lights all changing, but for no reason, kind of senseless pattern. If you pull over and stop your engine, you can even hear the lights changing. First a humm, then a click, and between clicks everything so

still, not even crickets downtown. And even though you're hundreds of miles from the coast you can hear the roar of the ocean in your ears, like in a sea shell, as if a massive flood was sweeping across the land, coming to wash everything away, and you could barely hear the water, miles off still, as it came into earshot. Like the Wave of Australian aboriginal prophecy that rises up and destroys mankind, washing the earth clean. While they all slept.

Occasionally, I'd pass a cop. And they'd always look at me funny and stare at my car. They always make me feel like I'm driving drunk. I find myself struggling to stay in my lane when a cop is behind me. But I've always been a hypochondriac.

Then I see this guy Ledsner, whom I had for an English writing class at the time, and he's walking along the streets alone, hands in his pants. Those goddamn pants. Black Levi's. Always wore them, every day (or every day I saw him) and I always wondered how he kept them so black, like they were brand new. But he would get chalkdust on them during every class. Then next day? Clean, black, but never faded. Did he wash them? He must have. And those turtlenecks he always wore. This time it was the maroon one, almost the same color as the one I had on. I felt like a clone. Like a goddamn moron.

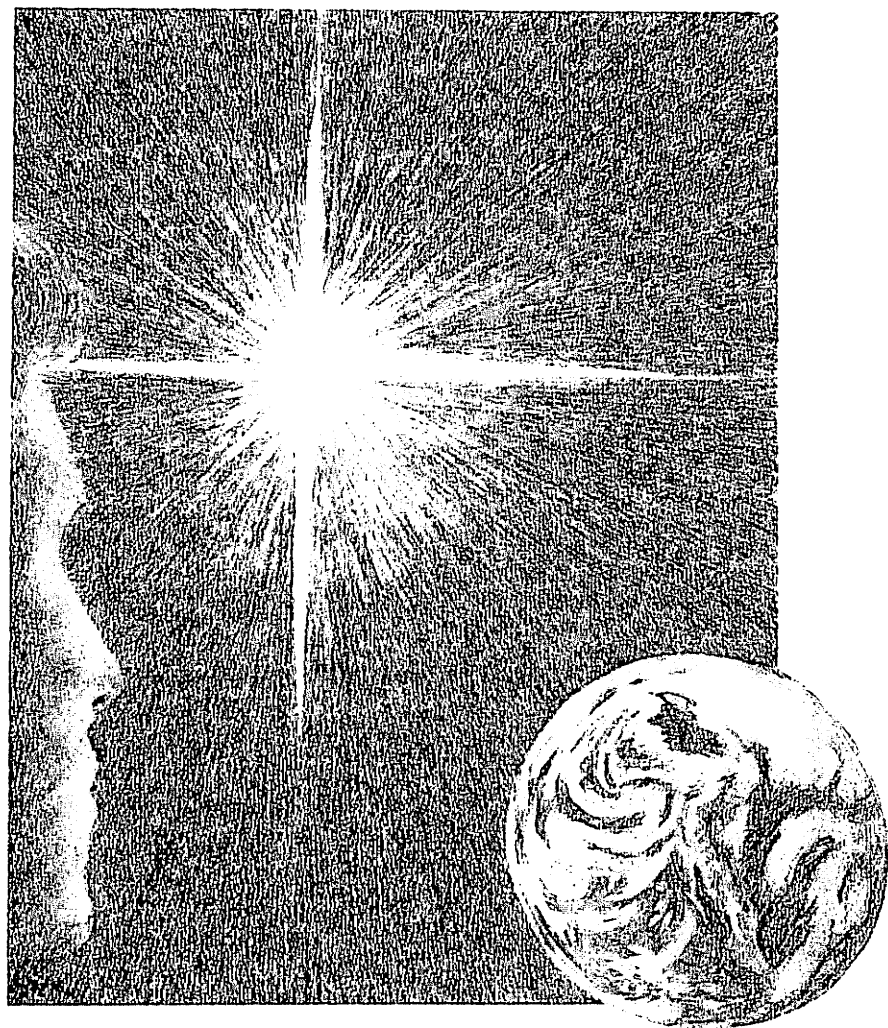
But the thing about Ledsner, about all teachers, but particularly about Ledsner, was I always wondered what this guy was really like. I always see these teachers in class and they're "teachers" you know? But you know they have real lives, real identities, and what you see in class is just this one highly refined aspect of themselves. You know there's got to be so much more. Things. Seedy things. Vices, perversions. Things they're hiding that only come out during the most debauched department meetings and sometimes not even then. And with Ledsner I always got this feeling, like he used to be a heroin addict or had crazy all-night parties or went to those English Department gatherings and dosed the punch bowl with LSD.

Ledsner had that crazy look in his eyes, especially the left one, crazy blue eyes. Charles Manson eyes. And when I saw him walking the deserted streets before the onslaught of the wave, like the lone prophet of Armageddon, I had to follow him. I had to. I needed to see what his life was really like. I wanted to know what he did late at night when any responsible professor should be home correcting papers or in bed. So I did. I followed him in my car. About two blocks behind and always turning left and racing around the block then turning right, so he wouldn't suspect. And I knew it. He went to the donut shop. Helen's Donut Nook. Everyone knows about donut shops, donut cooks. What better place? You got an excuse to be open all night. You look like you're just selling donuts for Christ's sake. And you got the cops there

all the time. Right under their noses. And who's going to burn you or rob you with the cops there. So he's in there and out again in a flash, of course, with the little white paper bag, neatly rolled shut, grasped in his hand. Now I keep following him, and, as you'd expect, his pace has picked up, quickened quite a bit. He's walking out of downtown, into the residential area out by the park with all those trees lining the streets, and it's real dark and spooky and hard to see him in his dark clothes. But now he's looking more cautious, more aware, and I have to drop way back so that I almost lose him. Then I happen to turn a corner and see him two blocks down as he walks up the sidewalk into a house, his house I guess. Unless he's gone to one of his buddies' houses to do it.

I park right there, two blocks back and turn my engine off. It ticks as the engine cools and the steel contracts, and I wait a minute or so, wondering if what I'm doing is right, or safe. But I can't stop now. I have to see it. I have to know. The car door creaks as I open and close it, so loud. I feel like a burglar. And as I creep over the lawn in front of his house my adrenalin is pumping so my hair stands on end, every follicle straight up and tingling. My heart feels like it's going to explode or pop up in my throat and out of my mouth the way it's pounding, and I keep swallowing it down with this warm taste of metallic blood in my mouth. I can't tell how much noise I'm making because of the way it's pounding in my ears. In the dark the house looks yellow, beige. It's only one story, probably two bedroom. I approach the big front window where I see light beaming through a gap in the curtains. When I look in, I can tell it's the living room. It's pretty stark, just a ratty old white couch on the left, a coffee table in front of it and a television on the right. That's all there was, and a lamp, and light brown wall-to-wall carpeting, and off-white walls with that white stucco ceiling shit I think has asbestos in it. Pretty depressing really. And there's Ledsner. He's alone, sitting there on that grubby couch, arms dropped at his side, staring into the t.v. Those crazy blue eyes. I hate the way people look when they're watching t.v. It scares me. They look so lifeless. Like living dead. Like they have no souls. I look around for the goods. On the coffee table there's some donuts on a brown and green plate. A jelly, a fritter and an old-fashioned with a bite taken out of it. He isn't chewing anything though, just staring. And I feel the surf, that's coursing in my blood and roaring in my ears, flood my brain. The wave has come. Not crashing and destroying all before it in one burst as I had expected, but slowly rising like a rain-swollen river, engulfing me in a vast flood. I hold my breath, but can only fight so long before my strength wears out, my resolve. Then I have to let go, let it take me, let it pull me under, gasping as the coldness fills my lungs. From there, it works numbing

way through my system, quelching every last spark and smoldering vestige. Looking up, I see the blurred moon and stars shining faintly down through a mile of water. My movements, my thoughts, everything decelerated now, I turn around and walk back to my car. Get in. Put the key in the ignition. Turn it. Drive home. After about ten or twenty minutes I realize I've been sitting there in my car, in my driveway, engine off. I don't think I fell asleep, but I don't remember thinking about anything. Nothing at all. Just sitting there I guess. So I pulled out the key and opened the door. It was so goddamned quiet outside, even the crickets and dogs. Everything was asleep... I got out and went into my house, went to bed. Last time I went out like that.



Gregg Hammond

DIVIDED BY ZERO

—*William David Jackson*

There's a fractured face that haunts me,
in every tree of a child I see.

The intimate eye

and

intimate I

Once knew lives gone.

Insanity is just the sanest thing left I know,

so I refuse to let it go.

Visions spinning like a record with the needle stuck in one groove,
clinging to the past, refusing to move.

FALL HARVEST

—*Den'Al Damron*

The red apples are late this season.

They say it's because the heat
has slowed their ripening
and won't let their shy blush
quicken to a desirable hue.

Unlike our love

which was a deep, ardent crimson
in the heat of the summer—
an arrogant apple
that knew no shame.

But our love soon bruised

and now it ferments like fruit
from some other season.
A young Pippin picked
and tasted too soon,
its tartness stinging out tongues
and bringing on tears
that dry before reaching
the floor.

And what shall we do now?

Is it possible to place this blemished fruit
on some safe window sill to heal
in the warm autumn sun?
Or would it be best
to follow nature's will
and drop to the ground
so the worms can get on with their business?

... in the Eye of the Beholder

—*Ande Gabrych*

You shoulda' seen him. He almost looked graceful; y'know? Is'pose you'd wanta know what happened, but it's hard to explain. Real hard to put into words. But I'll try.

Y'see I was comin' home from Toad's house. We call him Toad 'cause he talks real low. He 's a nice guy, a little weird. Well, anyways, I was just walkin' along, when I looked up to see if that storm was cmin', like the weatherman said it would. Those guys never get anything right. It kinda pisses me off the way they're always wrong. Well as I was lookin' up I notice this guy in a suit and tie standin' out on the ledge of the real tall building over on Twenty-third. You know the one. I think it's some sort of bank headquarters or something.

So this guy, total yuppie, is clutchin' to the sides of the building, lookin' dramatic as hell, and he yells, "Hey, girl!"

I yelled back up at him, to see if I was the one he was yellin' at. "Me?"

"Yeah, you, the black girl." Then he gets all snotty and says, "You see any other girls around?"

"No." I was sorta' pissed about the way he called me the 'black' girl, but I figured hey, he's a little psycho anyways so who cares.

"Don't you go running and tell anyone 'bout this, okay?" He musta' been worried I was going to run and tell the cops or somethin'. See, no one else was around. 'Cause you know how that building's way out in the middle of nowhere, and it was around eight o'clock. But it was still real light out, bein' it was summer and all.

Okay, so I yell back, "Why are you gonna' kill yourself for?" I sounded kind of stupid, but I don't care he was kind of a moron anyway.

"Whadda' you care?" He starts ballin' you know, "No one cares!" He sounded like a really bad cop show, "Please leave me alone. I don't want an audience or nothing."

This guy was real weird you know, in the head. "Don't jump!" It came off as real corny sounding, but I really didn't know what to say. Public school doesn't cover suicide prevention tips.

"NO!" he screamed and the next thing I knew, he jumped. I couldn't believe it. It was real weird though, real hard to explain.

He sorta—sprung off the ledge like a cat after a bird. I know it musta' happened in just a few seconds, but you know how time can get all distorted and slow, well it did.

His arms were all outstretched, like he was reaching for Heaven. The weird thing was the sun was setting, and it made him so... pretty. The

orange pink just seemed t' glow around him as he fell. I remember a scream, but he was silent, so it must've been me. I don't remember screaming. So he was all stretched out and glowing. His jacket was flapping in the breeze.

He didn't kick or flip around much like they do in the movies.

He looked happy and scared at the same time. There was a nauseating thud and it was over. His flight was over and I got kinda' depressed. Not 'cause he was dead, but because he wasn't pretty anymore.

His body was sorta' twisted at a real unnatural angle, like some distorted joke of a human.

I walked over to him. It was kinda' too bad he ruined that nice suit. His face was gone, sorta' scratched away. But he was smiling I could tell. I walked over to the flower pots by the doorway and made this chain of flowers. I put 'round his head. The sun was lower now so everything turned orange. The blood sparkled, and glittered real nicely, reflectin' the light. I stood there and admired how beautiful it was. I woulda' stayed with him longer, but I remembered I had t' be home soon. So I left.

Sometimes I wonder if he felt any pain when he hit, I hope not, it was too pretty to be ruined by pain.

V. ANNE

—*Mark Sirard*

She is an interesting hurricane
or a black and white photograph
of a windmill

She is a quiet house
with all the furniture missing
or a naked boy

my blood spits out over the pews
where she kneels...
my arms shake at the violent spinning ills
where she only watches...
my skin stretches over splintered poles
—remnants of acceptance
where she coughs me out...never to breathe me in again

She is an open window
that is cool and calming til sleeps end
or a warm blanket
that is never enough in the chill of morning

FOOTFALLS OF THE MIND

—*Mikel Schmidt*

From the mouthless face pour out
Strains of a song yet unsung,
And the word known to all
Trembles on the pensive lips of my fingers
Longing to be caressed
Into the lifted ears of attentive skin.

My senses whirl about tangling into sound.
Your eyes play furtive chords
Across my skin's fingertips,
My mouth tastes in your lips the sound of flung rhythms—
Colors dark hues linger on my tongue's back—
Unsprung in evasive dissonances,
You light across my eyes.
To your ear's tongue
These piquant sounds lie away
Yet, drawing near, I long to play these
Into the small, open hands of your skin.
Your voice my fingers mold
Into motionless, yet writhed forms—
Each tintured with the verdigris of loss
Peopling my mind's arid landscapes.
Your every syllable, your each inflection
Comes to me in moist paints
That I rub and smooth in textured layers
Across the canvas of my ear
Creating the whorled sound of you.
Your skin, curved in unknown stone—
Resisting, giving way—lies embedded
In shadowed depths and lighted contours,
Exhaling evening's vermilion breath.

The keys of your piano soul
Flex downwards small, felted hammers
Striking forcefully, tenderly against strings unseen—
Resonant life wound within themselves—
Their ends knotted to tingling infinity
Call up the universe's polyphonic voice.

Your skin is a hieroglyph of unknowing
That my blindman's fingers probe tentatively;
Waking to life from a sleepless dream,
Filled with the vision of eyed touch,
Urgently, they cipher silences of skin
That point past chasms of nothingness.

Your being's footfalls echo autumn
Within the leaf'd floor of my ear,
Inverting my life's four-cornered seasons,
Where branches root into azured soil
Drawing up deliquescent minerals of air,
Where branching and leafing roots flow
Through a dense, ocher atmosphere
Warmed by shattered rays of voiced stone—
Over-ripened with suffused desires,
Sadness ferments beneath dull grapeskins of thought
And bursting, drip to earth a remorseful wine.
My self arboresces beneath your gaze
Dropping away brittle hand-shaped leaves,
Pierced with languishing colors,
Revealing delicately pulsed existences,
Skating through iced air,
Their toothed ends sharpen in pain's descent—
Edges slicing through the tender clouds
Allowing drops of being to leak through
Spattering my soul with longing of you.
The leaf-veined wind takes hold the sky
Tearing the cerulean cloth into ribboned strips
Wrapping you in gauzed lucidity,
While watered surfaces dance with abandon.

Ceaselessly, torrent bound, my senses arch
Over your being's fractured silences
Tumbling into your soul's plunged depths—
Immersed in liquescent impulses,
The detritus of longing smooths to pebbles—
My senses swirl away surfacing in thought.

GOOD COUNTRY REVENGE

—Angela Nelson

(An original continuation of Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People".)

Things had been going according to plan for Hulga since that disastrous day in the barn. She now had a teaching position at the University of Georgia at Athens, she had successfully adjusted to a whole new way of life, and she had a date that evening with Vingil Hunter.

During the past five years, she had replaced her old wooden leg with the best artificial leg that money could buy. She got involved in physical therapy and learned how to walk and even dance with barely even a limp. Whenever anyone seemed curious about her leg, she simply told them she had a serious bout with polio as a child and that it had damaged some of the nerves in that leg.

She also began having Mrs. Freeman wash and set her hair on a regular basis. She invested in the best cosmetics that the local drugstore had to offer and took painstaking steps to apply them in just the right manner. The first time she walked into the kitchen after applying the goop, both Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman stood gaping at her, as though they were seeing her for the first time.

"Why, joy," Mrs. Hopewell finally said, "you look mighty perty. I always said you would look nicer with a little fixin' up."

"I do believe that them wild dogs runnin' off with your old wooden leg was the best thing that ever happened to you," Mrs. Freeman said.

Hulga smiled to herself. It had not been easy to convince them that a pack of wild dogs had grabbed her wooden leg and run off with it, but Hulga thought it such an outrageous story, they would have to believe it. Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman were doubtful, but unwilling to cause poor Joy-Hulga any further trauma. The sheriff, however, who had searched for her all night, was very suspicious.

"Pardon me, mam, but I done lived in this same county all my life and I ain't never seen no pack of wild dogs around here," he said.

Joy-Hulga met his gaze, her head held high. "Neither have I," she said, "but I swear on my mother's bible that they came from out of nowhere and took my wooden leg."

Mrs. Hopewell put her hand to her only child's forehead, certain now that she was in a feverish state of delirium.

The sheriff, being the good, Christian man that he was, and being totally unaware of Hulga's lack of religious convictions, accepted her declaration and left the house. He never questioned her again.

The task of finding Manley Pointer, however, had proven to be a more

difficult one. Hulga had hired the most renowned investigator in the county. He had searched every nook and cranny in the state and come up with nothing. After a year of this, he insisted that no such person existed. He said he could no longer work for her and honestly accept payment for services that he could not render. Hulga, though, was determined. She told him that she didn't care how long it took to find Manley, she would still continue to pay him until he was found. When she promised him a substantial bonus when Manley was found, the investigator agreed to continue the search.

Four years after that day in the barn, the investigator called to give her the news.

"I've found him, Miss Hopewell," he said. "He's living in Athens. He's an assistant coach at the University of Georgia there. His name isn't Manley Pointer though. It's Virgil Hunter."

Hulga almost laughed out loud. The young man who claimed to be dying four years ago was now coaching athletic events. Her anger was rekindled.

The next week, Hulga took a trip to the University of Georgia at Athens. She took a tour of the school and applied for a teaching position as Joy Hopewell. When she had passed by the football field that day, she had caught a glimpse of Manley. There was no mistaking that it was he. He was still tall and nice-looking, with the same sweaty face and pointed nose. He wasn't as lean as before, but he wasn't fat. His profession had given him muscles.

Hulga was contacted that very week by the head of the Philosophy department and scheduled for an interview. Within the month, she was hired. She leased a small apartment a block from the school and thus began her new life.

It was the talk of the campus that Virgil Hunter was quite the ladies' man. Taking care of the women was as much a sport to him as football. So, Hulga was not at all surprised when he finally asked her for a date.

"Why, Virgil," she drawled, in her most *femme fatale* voice, "I would love to go out with you!"

"How about dinner?" he asked. "I know of this wonderful little French place...."

"Oh, I don't know," she interrupted. "I was thinking maybe we should go somewhere more private so we could talk and not be interrupted."

"Well, I don't know," he said. "Can you think of a place close by where we could go?"

"How about if we just spend the evening at your house?" she asked.

Virgil was delighted. This was going to be easy. It had been a long time since he had tasted a woman's pleasures without at least buying her dinner.

"That would suit me just fine," he said, smiling. "What time should I call for you?"

"Eight o'clock," she said, and she smiled too.

Before her date that night, Hulga stopped by the drugstore to get her medication. Her heart condition had worsened in the past five years and although the tranquilizers could not cure her condition, they certainly helped in easing the pain. In order to complete her plan tonight, she must have them.

"Hello there, Miss Hopewell," the druggist said, as she entered the store. "I have your medication all ready for you."

"Thank you, Sam," Hulga said.

"Is there anything else you need?" he asked.

"I need some glue," she said.

He pulled a small, white jar from the shelf. "Here you go," he said. "This is good for wood, paper, anything like that."

"No, I need something stronger," she said. "I need the strongest glue you have."

He put the small, white jar back in its place and pulled out an oblong tube. "This is the strongest we have," he said. "But I don't think it's what you want. Only builders use it. It's like cement. Sticks to anything and once it's stuck, it's there forever."

"I'll take it," she said.

"Will this be all now?" he asked.

"This will indeed be all," she said, and she smiled.

Virgil called for Hulga promptly at eight. She was dressed as usual in slacks, but she had bought a special blouse for this event. It was made of lavish lace and sensual satin. She also carried a satchel in her arms.

"What's in the satchel?" Virgil asked.

"A bottle of wine and a few other things," she said.

Virgil was very pleased. He hadn't had to buy her dinner and now she had supplied the booze. Things were looking better all the time. He felt lucky.

Once inside Virgil's house Hulga immediately went to the kitchen. She didn't seem to notice her surroundings at all. Most of the women he had brought here had found it necessary to look through everything and even snoop through his medicine cabinet in the bathroom. She was different and this intrigued him. He followed her into the kitchen.

"What are you doing?" he asked. He noticed the satchel was on the table.

"I'm going to pour us some wine," she said. As she reached up to retrieve the glasses from the cupboard, the lace of her blouse outlined her breasts in a very fascinating way. Virgil was overwhelmed with desire. With one quick movement, he was behind her, squeezing her

to him, his lips covering her neck with kisses.

"Virgil!" Hulga said as she turned and faced him. She tried to pull away from him, but his arms would not budge from her waist.

"Please Joy," he said. "Can I have just one little kiss?"

"Why, of course," she said, as she raised her fingers to meet his approaching lips. "But, not now. I want to talk first, drink a little wine, unwind. There will be plenty of time for kisses."

Although disappointed, Virgil relented and released her. After all, he had not bought her dinner and she had brought the wine. She didn't owe him nothing. If anything, he owed her.

"Why don't you go find some nice music on the radio?" she asked.

Once he was out of sight, Hulga poured the wine into two large goblets. She took the bottle of tranquilizers from the satchel and took out three capsules. She opened them one at a time and poured the powder into Virgil's goblet. It wouldn't kill him, she was sure, but it certainly was a large enough dosage to knock an elephant out. Besides, she didn't want him dead. That would be too kind.

When she entered the living room, Virgil was seated on the end of the sofa, his feet propped up on an ottoman. He had unbuttoned his shirt down to his navel and his expression was like that of a wolf on the prowl. He looked so ridiculous Hulga wanted to laugh out loud. She sat down beside him on the sofa and gave him his wine.

He took a sip and then asked, "How come you never wear skirts? Is it because of your leg?"

Hulga's heart turned to ice. Did he recognize her? She sat, feeling like a trapped animal, still and silent.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Joy," he said, taking her hand in his. "I shouldn't have asked that. Everyone at school knows about your bout with polio when you was a kid. I was just wondering about it, that's all." He lifted her face to his and said, "Anyway, I think you're real brave." He had the same look of admiration he had had that day in the barn.

Hulga wondered how many other women had fallen for that look. She felt a knot growing in the pit of her stomach. She lifted her goblet in the air and said, "To bravery, then."

Virgil lifted his goblet to hers and they drank. Hulga watched as he downed it in three gulps. A little of it dribbled onto his chin and when he had finished, he wiped it away with his sleeve. He sat his goblet on the table and pulled Hulga to him. He immediately began covering her face with kisses, hot and demanding. Although she didn't return his kisses he didn't seem to notice. So she sat there, very still, and waited.

She hadn't waited long when, just as he was about to kiss her ear, Virgil's eyes closed and the full weight of him fell against her neck. She called his name several times but he didn't respond. When his

breathing became steady and even, she pushed and pulled at him until he was on his back on the sofa.

The pains in her chest were coming more frequently and intensely now. She had had several of them since she had been with Virgil. She knew she must act quickly.

She retrieved the glue from the satchel and sat on the ottoman beside Virgil's sleeping figure. Slowly, she lowered his pants to his ankles. As she lowered his underwear, she looked away, not wanting to see in the flesh what she had only seen in her anatomy textbooks in college. Yet, how was she to succeed in her task if she didn't look? Slowly, she turned her head to view Virgil's most cherished possession. It didn't look anything like the pictures in the books. In the pictures she had thought it royal and majestic-looking, strong and piercing. This thing looked weak and vulnerable and not at all royal. Pity struck her heart. She feared this feeling may overwhelm her, so she looked quickly away and opened the tube of glue. Carefully, she applied it to the inside of his left thigh. Then, with only the slightest hesitation, she placed the limp piece of flesh to his sticky thigh and held it there. When she was certain the glue was dry, she left the house, satchel in hand.

The next morning, Virgil woke up with an intense hangover and an inability to move. The slightest movement caused him great pain. He used the phone by the sofa to call for help. When the ambulance arrived, the paramedics found Virgil just as Hulga had left him, flat on his back with his pants down.

"What seems to be the problem?" one of the paramedics asked.

"Can't you see?!" Virgil said, pointing to his nakedness. "I'm glued! I can't move because I'm glued!"

Upon further observation, they finally understood and could barely manage to put him on the stretcher for laughing so hard. Eventually, their laughter subsided save for a few brief snickers. They had him loaded on the stretcher and almost out the door when Virgil said, "Hey! Can't you at least cover me with a blanket or somethin'? I got my pride, you know!"

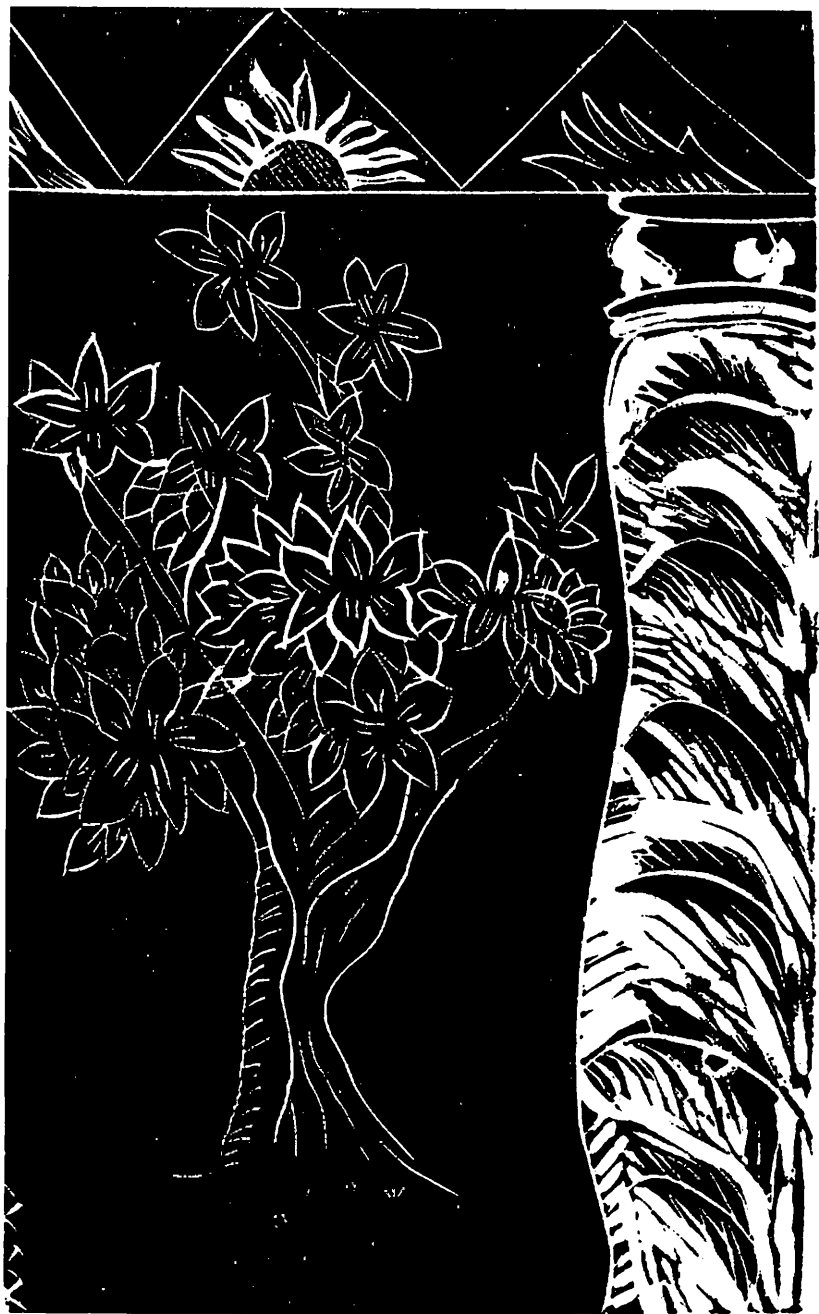
With that, the laughter began anew and it was an hour before he was successfully loaded into the ambulance.

A policeman was waiting by Joy Hopewell's office on Monday morning. The campus was buzzing with the news that although Virgil had sustained serious bodily injury over the weekend, no one seemed to know the nature of it. Joy Hopewell was wanted for questioning. The head coach of the football team had questioned Virgil's doctor but he said he couldn't reveal things that his patient didn't want people to know.

"Just tell me this, doctor," the coach said. "Will he be able to coach football after this?"

The doctor thought a moment and then said, "Yes, he'll be able to coach football, but it may be a long time before he can participate, especially in certain contact sports."

When Joy Hopewell didn't show up at the college, the policeman made his way over to her apartment. He knocked several times and called her name, but with no response. When he tried the door, he found it to be unlocked. He found Joy in her bedroom, lying on her back in the middle of the bed. She was very still and when he checked for her pulse, there was none. Her face was frozen in an expression of pure amusement, as if she had just heard the punch line of a great joke. In her hand she held a small piece of paper upon which she had written: "I am not Joy. I am Hulga."



Steve Swanson

HER PHYSICIAN

—*Danielle Alexich*

She watched him
enter, flat and white
like a blank page
in her life.
Not a mark.

Good afternoon.
He looked at her with one frozen eye.
So.
This bleeding pain
of yours.
Show me where it is.

With a maestro's passion,
she swept the world
to her heart.
A symphony of color
pierced the doctor.
For one white moment
he was audience.

Ah, yes.
You have—
pardon me?
poems?
Well, it seems they have calcified.
You've allowed too many to collect.
I recommend surgery.
Sign here.

But they are orphans,
she said,
They don't want
to be separated.
Their bones are so fragile.

And then, inside, she heard
a faint tinkling of icicles,
the blue music of unborn chimes.
A tide rose within her.

She watched the doctor's
hand give itself to
the force of a latex glove
as a burglar
surrenders his features
to the stocking mask.

He smiled.
Trust me, he said.
You'll function better without them.

But the tide of the woman's dreams
was strong. It plucked her from his sight
and carried her to the turquoise sea
where time has no home
and music is born in circles.

Years later,
her physician lies awake
at night, when streets are black
and wet with the world's grief.
He is motherless, mute,
weeping to the painful
sound of bells.

And then, inside he feels
a stirring of bones,
a silent thawing of ice.
Sparks of rain dance wildly
under the street lamp
and a woman surrounded
by her children
appears before him.

We need to talk,
she says, and hands him
a poem.
You've been impossible

to reach.
Your pain has bled
the voice from you.
Can you show me
where it is?

He moves her hand
to his heart. She
feels it beating,
a wingless bird.
She lowers her head
to his chest
and waits
for the first sign of color.

When a woman finds out
that she is her physician,
her healing words
can sift pain,
floating like cirrus fingers
across a bruised sky.
She can find a pulse
on any page
and when called,
will revive the music
of her soul.

MOSAIC

—*Glenda T. Velasco*

Picking the pieces
Putting them together
Fragment of reality
Fragment of imagination
A bit of dialogue
Nothing is really false
About me
I just hide
One side
And then another
So I am
An incomplete picture
But I prefer
To be called
Still in the works
Still in the process
Let me gather some more pieces
More fragments of reality
More fragments of the imagination
More bits of dialogue
Thoughts
Actions
Emotions
Give it time
For me to place
The missing parts

A POEM ON IMPERFECTION

—William David Jackson

The blind old warrior
Bent and weathered white
His smooth thick limbs shining in the sun
His scars, like medallions, mark the storm he had to fight
But he'll not see the reward for all he's done.

He's a shelter by the stream for those w/o a home.

He's an ark for all that hide beneath his deck.

He's my priest today, more an Icon I've never known
For the cross that wore a man upon its neck.

The Radiant Sun

Splinters stone and bone

Distant in the deserts little can be grown.

But little lizards tell me life abounds where life can

And God supplies grace to every humble man.

The pebble in your shoe outweighs the mountain ahead...

I can't tell you all the little lizards said

But they showed me a garden where nothing yet had grown.

for the keeper, they said, had planted only stone

and now you, my love

face me in the storm

Blemished as all the worlds sinful form

Rough as a stubbled kiss comes the pleasure with the pain

and as the salty tears run across our lips

the water wears the stone as the rock wears the rain.

I saw the warrior stand and I saw the steam run,

the sun, the storms, the wounds that healed and scars that remain

and I think we shall blossom, like a cactus in the sun.

the painter and his model

—*Melanie J. Smith*

he was a painter
and i was his model
the model of his perfect woman.
in the morning hours
he would press me against
the cloth
and i'd laugh
as he tickled me
with his brush
stroking me back
with bright blue paint
oh, what a treat
it is to be surreal.
he could paint lemons
that i could pick
off the white
taste, squeeze in my tea
i'd often sleep inside
the canvas
with a vase of daisies
or a lion still wet
with the painter's effort.
he often told me
he loved me
like a man tells
his own reflection.
he hung me high
in every room
so i could see him
eat his eggs
trim his bread
sleep with his lover.
i've always loved him
like one loves
one's own heart
and i pity him
for he has given me
the everlasting
while he was but
a mortal soul.

HUMILITE

—Susan K. Rits

Near death had no humbling effect on him. Even as he lay on the emergency room table, with I.V.s in arms and various machines attached, it did not. Though undoubtedly a tingle of fear shimmered up his spine and mixed itself in with the pain in his heart, he was not humble. Humility is the mead of death. It is death to be humble for death. Instead, he wondered serenely if he'd float up to the ceiling, or hear voices, or have other experiences he'd heard about. He wanted them—he collected them—and when he didn't have them, he was irritated. Even as the painkillers blurred his vision, and sent dreams floating high in the back of his mind (but every now and then passing over his thoughts), he was irritated that he might miss out. What's the use of having a heart attack if you don't get to see the tunnel, the bright light, and tell everybody that you didn't want to come back? Death (or near death) was an experience he must not sleep through.

He was not humbled by his emergency. He reigned from the intensive care unit as he'd reigned at home. He sat upon fresh white starch, raising and lowering his head to match his visitors'. Although there were five other beds (and I assume five other patients,) we never saw them. The nurses manned the door of his ante-chamber, allowing one or two in at a time. Even the waiting room was different—better: cush chairs, semi-private sleeping chambers, private phone lines full of special calls from condoling relatives. Here is where you waited if you weren't granted admittance to Intensive Care, given an audience with the patient.

Later, when he was home, we all tip-toed around for fear of making too much noise, causing too much stress, strain and another attack. He sauntered through the silent, hollow halls, much revived by his early recovery. Secretly, I suppose, he might have winced, grimaced perhaps, that his heart really would betray him. That the body he had conscientiously fed on fish and fresh vegetables would condemn him anyway. It might have been a very humble feeling to realize that he might die. At any moment, drop to the floor clutching his traitorous organ, feeling pains that originated in flesh, not emotion, and then expire—like a library book. My heart has expired, may I have it renewed?

It must have been a humbling experience, but it wasn't. Because he knew his death, and it was not among the motes and particles. It was

not open, popping fish mouth and bulging frog eyes. His death was grace. It was chateaubriand, it was peaches and champagne, it was smoked salmon and fresh green beans marinade in lemon sauce.

So, he was not cowed by angeoplastes and cardiac catheters. The thought of tiny balloons inside his blood vessels, and various white-coated medicine men watching the tides of his blood, stained blue, did not intimidate him. He was a man of substance. If they were all interested in his substance, then let them be!

He reclined, supine, upon the divan. He leafed *Atlantic Monthly* and paused. What an awkward attempt it had been, by somebody else's death. How trivial and unthought out. And the very fact that his death had not taken him, strengthened his belief in his own death. If he were an ordinary man, if he only lived an average existence, contributing an average amount to the substance of the world, then surely this would have been the death of him. But it was not. And so he was legitimized, legalized, proved valuable.

He crossed his feet upon the damask cushions in antique green, and played with his toes. A tiny smile twitched at the tips of his lips, and a pink tongue darted out to still it. He would have to give this some more thought. Death. Perhaps after dinner.

ALONE

—*Amelia Barth*

A green child leaned against a skyscraper,
Arms wrapped around the knees drawn to its chin,
And studied a sea of shoes and forgotten gum.

HMMM . .

—*Amelia Barth*

There's a chirping cricket
Writing ballads in a saucepan.
Pity that the symphony is gone.
A sugar cube dissolves
In a glass of flat champagne
As blue mushrooms melt on the lawn.
Twenty Amazons diverge
In a shopping mall,
Searching for an underwire bra.
A gleaming gold band
Is spit upon the sand
Dislodged from a vulture's claw.
Poets converge
In coffee shops,
Complaining of life and its ruts,
While three blind mice sit
With a can of Bactine,
Anxiously spraying their cuts.
A New Ager squats
On his rooftop with 'scope
Waiting for the planets to align.
And at the mountain's peak,
The guru has visions
In his boxers of paisley design.
Silk curls in waves
From a window sill
As Rapunzel gets another spiral perm,
And tabloids reveal
That banana peel
Will help keep your cellulite firm.
The invisible man
Wears plaid golf pants
For he has to shop on his own,
While a message arrives
From the borders of space,
Stating that Earth was a loan.

DEAD HORSE

—*Bob Garner*

Don't cry my child,
that's how they pray,

pumped up with air,
four hooves into the sky.

They walk on clouds
while saddled to the ground

and contemplate
alfalfa.

Contributor's Notes

Danielle Alexich teaches in the English Department at CSUC.

Ame(lia) Barth has been seeing strange visions since she colored the inside of her bellybutton purple at age seven. She now enjoys near perfect happiness after falling in love with a man who refuses to tie his shoes.

Den'Al Damron is an English major in her senior year at Chico State. She writes poetry on occasion.

Ande Gabrych loves theatre, writing, and singing. He hates discrimination and small yippy dogs.

Bob Garner is alive and almost well.

Brett Harvey was born and raised in Chico. He has a BA in Theatre Arts from UCSC and is continuing his education at Chico state.

Diane E. Imhoff has a BA from Sacramento State in English. She's been writing since her children were born. They finally gave her time, though not much.

William David Jackson was born in 1959; The only son of his father, one of dozens by his mother, he never lived with either. He was raised in taverns and defines his life as a wrestling match with God. He has been a magician as long as he can remember and his poetry is the distilled form of this madness.

Tricia Lord is a graduate student and teaching assistant in the Department of English at CSUC.

Angela Nelson started writing as a child when she would write short stories and sell them to her cousins for extra pocket change. She is an English major pursuing a career in teaching.

Susan Katherine Rits is a graduate student in Creative Writing in the Department of English at CSUC. Although her focus is playwriting, she enjoys whetting her writing skills on short stories now and then.

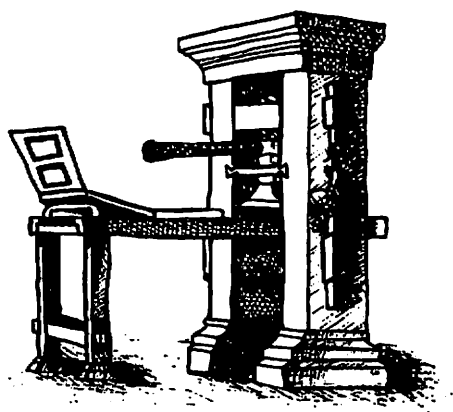
Mikel Schmidt was born in Bakersfield February 11, 1969. He lives in Chico.

Michael Sirard is a sophomore at Chico State in the Humanities program. Outside of literature his interests tend towards music, theatre, and modern philosophy. His literary influences include Sexton, Sartre, Tess Gallagher, Ginsberg, e.e. cummings and Ayn Rand. His writing is fueled by his "passion for the human spirit" and he hopes to carry this through his life.

Melanie Smith was born in Pomona California in March of 1970. Her birth created the person she is today. She has been writing since 1974. She won a spelling contest in the first grade. It would prove to be the last.

Glynda T. Velasco's last (and first) publication was in a junior high literary magazine called *The Zephyr*. She thought maybe she should update her efforts. She is a CSUC student majoring in English and a former *Watershed* editor.

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