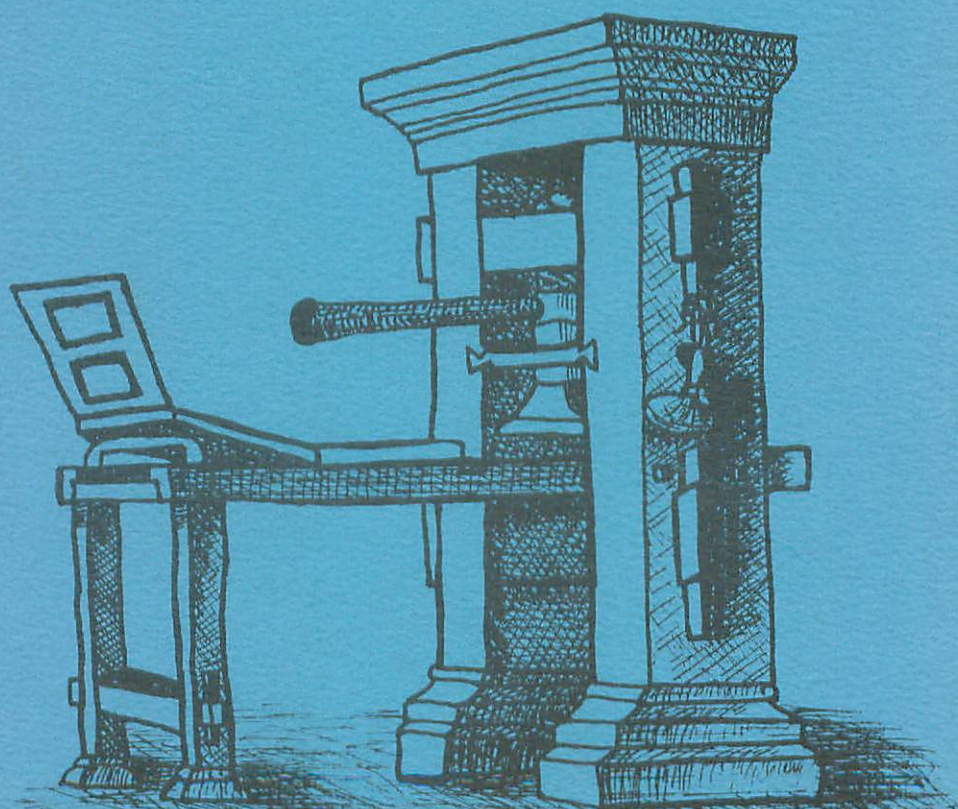


Trial Impression

A LITERARY MAGAZINE



volume 2 number 2

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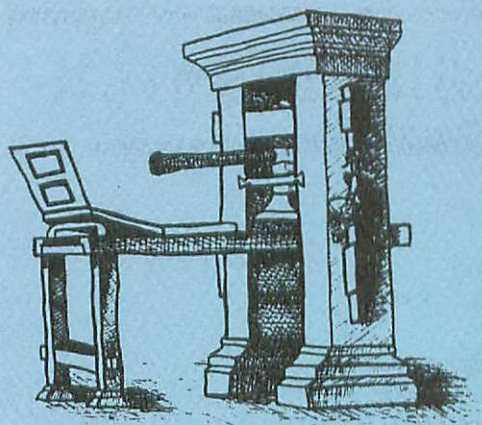
Alumni Association

CSUC English Department

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The Cover shows the Gutenberg press and lettering—Johannes Gutenberg made the original “trial impression” with his press in about 1450. We made our “Trial Impression” in the Spring of 1978.



Trial Impression is a literary magazine produced by the English Department's Literary Editing class (Engl. 296). It is also a printing term meaning the first run through a press. The "trial impression" is used to set the necessary adjustments for the final runs. Well, we've been through three issues now and we are still adjusting some . . . But this issue marks our one-year anniversary and we're happy to announce that support has grown with each *Trial Impression*.

The response to this issue was great and we'd like to thank the people who were directly responsible for the success of this issue. Mary Helen Casamajor and the Alumni Association deserve thanks for their generous financial contribution. The English Department, as always, was there with both financial and moral support. Advisors and founding editors Casey Huff and Jennifer Scott provided us with invaluable assistance in their guidance throughout the production of this issue while Ellen Walker, instructor of the Literary Editing class, gave us the opportunity to produce *Trial Impression*. Special thanks goes to Helen Hart for her time and creative energy in designing the cover and logo for this issue. Most of all we want to thank everyone who submitted their creative writing for consideration. With over 300 manuscripts to choose from, we had to extend the selection deadline by seven days. It was more work for us, but we loved it.

We encourage everyone interested in creative writing to submit manuscripts for the Fall issue of *Trial Impression*. The deadline for the next issue will be announced early next Fall and we look forward to the forthcoming manuscripts. Submissions should be left in the English Department office, Taylor 209, and accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Thanks once again for your support.

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Spring Fever

Is it the motion of a bird
Cleaning its beak on the moss
Or the blossom-scented breeze
That makes this one mourn
For the peace of springs past?

Who are those that must ever tiptoe
On the edge of a tear?

Fragile souls

Who suffer at the sight of quiet beauty
As the child with fever

Moans

Because even the blink of an eyelid
Aches.

—*S. P. Johnson*

Plains Funeral

Thrushing plains flash gold
South toward checks of winter wheat
Bobbing heavy before the harvest.

Foothill thunder thunder draws attention
West from the reaper's mass
And the preacher stutters
Beyond "taketh away"--

And what they remember
Stares cold at calloused hands
Creased black by generation and generation working
Before the storm
And praying after the harvest

—*Chris Gulbrandsen*

The Boatowners

A friend has questioned the rhythm of my poem.
I have looked at it for days.
Still, she says,
it's choppy.
I look in my ears
and find the canals full
of derelict boats, all different colors and sizes,
some burning red on the water.
One turns sideways and is caught in the locks,
the others piling up behind it.
All of the boatowners are shouting, drinking beer,
shooting flares into the night.
I resign myself to the confusion,
open a beer myself,
and decide I have always been a poor helmsman
in the maritime matters of words.

October - 1978

—*Don Pack*

“Abuela, con amour”

I stare at you.
You pretend not to see.
Your glasses slip down your thin,
pencil-sharp nose, pinching.
Your body has shrunk to half its size.
You have no room to store your brittle bones,
piercing the folds of skin,
hung loosely over your frame.
You live in pain.
Yet you rarely speak of it.

Our language is different.
You speak to me,
I smile and nod, unsure of the words.
You look up from your ever-present crocheting,
your eyebrows move closer together,
your hands, gnarled and disfigured, squeeze mine,
and we both understand.

—*Susan M. McVicker*

Grandma's Front Porch

Its chilling cement floor kept it cool
in the sticky Ontario summers.
I often sat on the plaid canopied swing,
dreaming of what it would be like
to sit there with my special fellow.
Grandma would probably still
stand in the screened doorway,
cranking her bedside clock,
as she did for Aunt Godi.

It served as the ultimate location
for Sunday photo sessions.
Jeannie and Karen modeling their kimonos,
Dad's trinkets from Korea.
The five sisters so hilariously poised,
in their annual Easter hat shot.
Each hat ostentatiously better.
Each smile ridiculously happier.

The twelve grandchildren,
brown paper bags clutched tightly,
pose miraculously still
for one click of the shutter
before the dash to find the
bright foil-wrapped chocolate eggs
on the bermuda lawn,
beneath the palm and eucalyptus trees.

Grandma's house was replaced with
a flat-roofed structure.
The glittered stucco of the doctor's office
now glimmers against the whitewashed
granite lawn.

—*Susan M. McVicker*

Lyrics

When you search for the luminous bird
The winged fountains cease
Without fail you lose the summer.

The delicate high tide draws back
From your skies—it has no deep pools
In long sheltering bays.

Do not look in caverns, falcon,
With lustful pleasure, for the brood.
I have no sacrifices in me.

Below sorrow, in peace
Crowned, freed in rebirth,
Drawn by the pulse of the abounding earth.

—Marija Kukubaiska
Translated from Macedonian (A Yugoslavian language)
by *Marcia Pennington*

Long Have I Lived in This Place

Long have I lived in this place
Where the waters well up out of mountains,
And children chase butterflies,
And the tall pinewoods
Bud forth the silence of the centuries.

Long have I lived in this place
And slowly time darkens in me.
Look. I say, look, that you know how it is.
Once these eyes were depths
Into which your desires dived
Like cranes in the sunshine.

And now we are only two dry wells
Passing the night listening to the rains.
Once these hands were plowmen
In the furrowed earth of your longings.
But now you sob to the willow wands,
Barren forks bending over the water.

Once, I say, that you, like the children,
Caught butterflies in your hand
And from the golden dust
There blossomed cherries in your garden.

Why were you so careless
As to crush them in your fingers?
Why did you not grasp that greatest wisdom
Lies in having one live butterfly from your childhood,
One warm star in your palm,
That will light up this place,
This place where long we have lived apart?
Long have we lived, time darkening in us.

—Atso Shopov

Translated from Macedonian (A Yugoslavian language)
by *Marcia Pennington*

Isolation

by Alix Schwartz

In my second year at the university I had occasion to read Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. I was reading, without understanding, an abstract philosophical passage which had to do with the role of society and organized religion as a substitute for conscience, when suddenly, as sometimes happens, an episode from my childhood rose up to illustrate clearly what, for me, Dostoevsky's words could not.

I was sitting in our jeep, waiting for Kenny to swing open the rusty pipe gate. Although he climbed slowly, even nonchalantly, I didn't grow impatient. I had my hand draped over the shift lever in what I assumed was a position of quiet confidence, born of long familiarity with my vehicle. At least that was the way I'd seen my father do it. I was very conscious of my responsibility, and proud that my father had entrusted me with this errand.

Kenny opened the gate, then leaned on it to keep it from swinging shut. I put the jeep in gear and tensed as it growled and jolted over the worst and steepest part of our road. Heavy winter rains had been carving deep gouges in the clay for many years, but we did only minimal upkeep on that part of the road. It was meant to discourage casual visitors, and served its purpose well.

I let the jeep roll backwards onto a little level place beyond the gate, to wait for Kenny to finish locking it. I looked back through the little back window to check if Morgan was still all right. Morgan, our big gray and white billy goat, was trussed up in the short bed behind me. He looked terrified: his amber eyes were bulging as he strained his neck to get a peek over the side.

My attention was diverted as Kenny climbed in, sat down beside me, and moved his rifle from the floor onto his lap. When he looked over at me I noticed that his complexion was strangely pale, considering that he lived mainly outdoors. When he turned back to look out the windshield I discovered the cause of his paleness. His shaggy blond hair hung in his face, covering everything but the tip of his skinny nose.

As I maneuvered the jeep up the road which traced a precarious line up the mountainside, I began a conversation with Kenny. Even though I was only twelve, and he was probably seventeen years old, I considered myself his equal. And perhaps because I was so young, I broached a subject that a more mature person would have tactfully avoided.

"Hear your mother moved to Arkansas with Doug." His mother was, in my eyes, very old and very undesirable. Nonetheless, everyone knew that she and Kenny had shared their

one-room house with any number of men, most of whom only stayed a single night. I could imagine, vividly and uncomfortably, how Kenny probably felt if he chanced to wake up in the middle of the night. And now she had packed up and moved all the way across the country. Without her to pay the rent, Kenny was homeless. He sort of just wandered around the valley, hunted and slept down by the river.

"Yeah, the dumb whore." Kenny's answer was abrupt and resentful. Although I had just been thinking the same thing about her, I shuddered to hear it said so openly, and by her son. Actually, that's the way he usually spoke about her, at least around me. I suppose he knew that his family's private affairs were common knowledge, and he compensated by acting as though he didn't care. I was extremely glad that my family lived in such an isolated spot, because my dad had three wives. Although people in the valley eventually realized that a lot of people lived up there, no one knew the exact relationships.

We passed the giant Douglas fir that stood in the fork of the road, but instead of taking the left turn that would lead us down the other side of the mountain to my house, we continued on the ridge road. I threw my head around, then back, for a quick look at Morgan. Kenny noticed my concern, and adopted it as a new topic for the conversation that had died some ten minutes back.

"That Goddamn goat of yours broke into Ezra Lemon's garden. You shoulda seen ol' Ezra out there tryin' to chase 'im out with a broom. Bet he thought it was World War I again or somethin'. He was just chasin' that goat around and around the garden, stompin' on all the lettuce and stuff, and ever' once in a while ol' Morgan'd rear up on his hind legs, and tilt his head over, you know like he does, and sort of threaten ol' Ezra. Well, ol' Ezra, he wasn't afraid, an' he finely chased that goat out o' there. You shoulda seen 'im after that. His whole garden wrecked, but he's sitting there on the porch with this big ol' grin, like he just won the war or somethin'." Kenny laughed unpleasantly.

I wasn't amused. "Well, he won't be doing that any more," I said, referring to Morgan. We were driving into a gigantic, uninhabited forest that was owned by a lumber company that wasn't due to log it again for another twenty years. I was supposed to tie Morgan to a tree, far enough out where he couldn't find his way back to civilization and gardens. Kenny was just bumming a ride because he wanted to do a little hunting. I thought he could help me out in handling Morgan, who was twice my size, so I gave him a ride even though I generally wasn't allowed to. My dad judged me capable of driving our eccentric jeep over those wretched roads, but he didn't want to have to be responsible for anyone else who might want to ride with me.

"This is far enough." Kenny was obviously thinking of his long hike back, and didn't want to get *too* far away from civilization.

"Naw," I said, unconsciously affecting his speech mannerisms. "We don't wan' 'im to find his way back."

"Sure, this is far enough," he insisted. "No one could find their way out o' here."

"Well, okay." Even though I felt so grownup, I bowed fairly easily to peer pressure. I stopped the jeep, and went around to open the tailgate. Kenny helped me unload the angry, confused goat, and we tied him to a Madrone tree. I said a quick good-bye to Kenny, then jumped in the jeep, conscious of the fact that Morgan could chew through a rope that thick in approximately fifteen minutes. We used to say that Morgan could even chew through chains, but I'm not sure now if that was a tall tale or not. Anyway, I needed a head start on him so he wouldn't follow me home. When I glanced into the rear view mirror I saw that he wasn't even trying to break loose. He was just staring forlornly after me, and I stepped hard on the accelerator to escape that reproachful look.

Two days later I was walking back up to the house, swinging my arms high above my head and then down again. I had been "down valley," a term we used for the lower half of the valley in which my family and I were the sole inhabitants. My arms were sorely stretched from hauling two white plastic five-gallon buckets up from the creek to water the plants. I'd taken nearly twenty trips that morning, and although I was still too small to fill them all the way up, those buckets seemed full to me. It was my job to water gardens #1 and 2; while my dad took care of 3 and 4. I wasn't assigned the first two because they were more easily accessible: they weren't. A *deer* would have had a hard time finding our gardens. But the plants in garden #3 had been treated with colchicine. Colchicine is a drug which multiplies the chromosomes in plants, causing them to be greener and more luxuriant, and much more potent than normal. But the first generation polyploid plants are highly poisonous. My dad always wore rubber gloves while handling them, and he wouldn't trust anyone else with the watering.

As I neared the house, my thoughts were occupied in thinking up a scheme whereby I could remain as inconspicuous as possible. I didn't want anyone to see me and get the bright idea that I should be put to work watering vegetables. At that age I had a strong aversion to what I considered women's work, into which category I placed vegetable gardening.

But all my schemes instantly evaporated when I saw Big Jim's yellow trail bike parked in our yard. I slipped in through the back

door, and, unnoticed, witnessed the following scene: Annie, my dad's youngest wife, was sitting on the sofa, with her baby at her breast. Big Jim, his back to me, was sitting at, and nearly dwarfing, our massive redwood table. He was blustering at Annie; at first it sounded to me as if he were merely saying "RRawrRR-rawrRaw," exactly as we kids did it when we were mimicking him in our play. We also referred to him, amongst ourselves, as "Big Dim." But that epithet wouldn't match his self-image at all. In fact, he acted as if he were the self-appointed sheriff of Wilderness Valley, a district which included our place—but only in his imagination. His other identity, also self-bestowed, was the one he used upon meeting us, the first season we lived up there. One day he drove up uninvited and introduced himself as the president of the BDGU (The Bighorn Dope Grower's Union). He'd come to give us the "dope on growing dope" (his expression). According to him, the area was secure and relatively problem-free, making allowances, of course, for a certain percentage of the crop which was bound to get "ripped off" each year. By that time my father had already acquired the reputation of an unsociable (to put it mildly) person. But I guess Big Jim never could take a hint. He still hadn't caught on when Morgan stuck his head and front hooves into the open door of Jim's pickup and nibbled off several delicious young plants that were in paper cups on the seat.

I suddenly realized that what Big Jim was saying to Annie directly related to me. ". . . If you wanted to get rid a him you shoulda told me . . . I'd a put a bullet in him right up front . . . better'n tyin' 'im up there to starve to death . . ."—These phrases and snatches of "inhumane" and "cruelty to dumb animals" blasted my ears in between the audible beating of my heart.

Opening the back door stealthily, I crept outside and under the low hanging branches of a redwood in our yard. There I crouched until I heard Jim's motorcycle, grumbling under his weight, move past me and up our road.

When I re-entered the house I saw my father, who had just that moment returned from down valley. He was hugging Annie, who seemed about to cry. The baby, still sucking, was crushed comfortably between them. He was angry at Jim, for acting like a policeman in something that was none of his affair, and especially for leaving before my dad had the chance to confront him. "That big bully. He's only got enough guts to sound on women and children. If I'd been here he'd never have treated you like that." Dad was trying to comfort Annie with his words, but they also served to release some of his own anger. I guess he resolved to handle the situation the next time he and Jim chanced to meet,

and in this way he assuaged his usually impulsive temper.

Later that day my dad found me up at the shop, sifting through some rusty nails. He asked me to tell him exactly where on the upper road I had tied Morgan, and seemed to recall just the Madrone I referred to. Then he questioned me about the rope and the knot. Although I had been sure at the time that I hadn't tied a slipknot, which would have strangled Morgan had he reached too far for leaves, I was pretty vague in my answer. I think now that I had convinced myself that I was responsible for Morgan's death.

My dad told me I could ride the Yamaha up there and "take care of it." I accepted that as I had always accepted his telling me to complete any job I had started. I didn't look on it as a punishment; and I believe that he never meant it as one. He could sense that I doubted my own innocence, and he wanted me to go up there and find out the facts for myself, to handle it myself. I guess he knew that it may have been easier on me at first if he disposed of the body, but that by doing it myself I had a better chance of disposing of my own imagined guilt along with it.

The approaching Yamaha frightened off a flock of heavy black vultures. The first thing I noticed was that, instead of being emaciated as I'd expected, the goat's body was bloated. A large roundish spot on his side had been stripped of its coat. I was doing my best to remain detached, and so far I was succeeding. I walked gingerly around him and severed the rope, close to the tree. I had to drag him several yards to the edge of the road, where the mountain fell away to form a cliff. I set my feet firmly and began to tug. I couldn't budge him at first. He was so heavy, and the day so hot, that I began to sweat. And suddenly, looking at that goat, I saw Morgan, the live Morgan, with my brother Eric and I chasing him and flinging ourselves onto his back for a ride. I blinked, and the images transposed, and suddenly I saw myself riding, not on Morgan, but on this repulsive carcass. By now I was crying freely, but with my mouth clamped tightly shut, in an effort to block out the stench—a vile combination of death and male goat—that burned my eyes and stained the air in ever increasing billows. I continued to pull on the rope, even more determined than before. But I couldn't keep my imagination in check. I saw the dead goat's yellow beard stiffly protruding, and I saw the live Morgan, peeing on his beard and going "blip, blip" with his mouth. I also saw the small, perfectly round hole in his side, just above his leg; and I took in the fact that neither the Madrone branch he'd been under nor a nearby whitethorn had been stripped of its leaves and bark. But somehow, with the physical exertion, the sobbing and the whirling in my head, I

didn't realize the significance of the clues my brain was automatically registering for use by the future aspiring writer.

The summer wore on, until early one morning I was awakened by the sweet breath, like that of an alfalfa-and-milk fed calf, of my four-year-old sister Julia. "Ivany," she whispered right into my face. She sweetened every name by affixing a "y" to the end. On some names, mine for example, it might seem as if this diminutive would sound awkward—but never when Julia said it.

She and I were especially close that year; we had something important in common. My mother, who had been his first wife, had divorced my dad several years back. And Julia's mother had left him the previous winter. That was one peculiar thing about our house: ladies sometimes left, but children never did. He wouldn't allow it. And he was probably justified; he made a better parent than most mothers I know. Sometimes I think he used to marry them just to get more babies. He really loved babies and children.

Julia was an early riser, and though she was content to play by herself, she needed someone to help her make breakfast when she got hungry. We were the only ones up that morning. I built a little redwood and fir fire in the kitchen stove to fry some eggs. It would surely become too hot for cooking later that day, but a morning fire would not be unwelcome.

I remembered that I was supposed to water garden #4 that morning. My father hadn't been able to the day before, because it was a dry year, and we had to wait for our little dam to fill. I was eager to take care of the watering before it got too hot, but Julia wanted someone to be with her.

"Maybe Eric'll hear the fire sparkling and wake up," she said. It was an implied promise that soon I'd be free to go down the valley. I was enchanted with every word that bubbled forth from her strawberry-like mouth, and I impulsively kissed her. She wrapped her soft, chubby arms around my neck, and I felt like I'd rather stay the day with her after all.

But Eric did indeed wake up, and I started off reluctantly. I followed a narrow dirt road that had once, long ago, led all the way to the ocean, six miles away. I had already passed the fallen redwood which marked the turnoff to #3, when an ominous shadow passed over me, tickling the hair at the back of my neck. I looked up to see a flock of vultures, no doubt the same ones who had gathered on the upper road when Morgan died. Just up ahead lay the "wood cemetery," a large roadside clearing where some fifty huge redwoods had been felled and left to decompose among their own shattered debris.

I was startled to see Kenny sleeping beside one of those logs. When I stopped walking it seemed that all of the motion and noise of the forest died along with the rustle of my footsteps. Although it was late morning, the sun had just overtopped the high ridge that walled in the eastern side of our sheltered valley. Its light shone full upon Kenny's prone figure, highlighting a clump of luxuriant green plants which he held across his chest. The shadows of the swirling vultures flickered in the serrated foliage, causing it to waver as if by a mocking breeze. But the air was deadly still. The only motion was the play of light and shadow, which was becoming more and more disturbing and unreal. Kenny's face gleamed palely in the full sunlight, until the black shadow of a wingtip licked across it. My motionless stance gave the birds renewed confidence; they circled closer, smothering him finally in darkness. I watched in spellbound horror as one of the vultures swooped down and lighted on Kenny's face.

The silence was shattered as I turned and ran. I ran and I ran, without stopping, until I got close enough to home to hear the children and the mamas playing and chatting in and around the house.

At that moment I realized that although Kenny had stolen those plants from us, we were still inadvertently responsible for his death. And I also realized that in all probability the homeless, motherless Kenny would never be missed. So that no one, not even the ineffectual self-appointed sheriff, had to know what had happened.

And, most vividly, I realized that the laughing and talking I could hear as I approached that house was the sound of my entire society.

Generation

They dropped a bomb
on Nagasaki, and I,
being as yet unborn,
slept through it all
deep within the bowels
of my earth womb.

And yet, I do believe,
that some slight tremor,
hardly noticed, crept in
to my fetal slumbers
like a Kafka vision.

How else to explain
the crumbled dreams
and vague terrors
which stalk my life,
of not exactly death,
but something far worse.

—*Phillip McGowen*

When We Are Awake

The world is plunging deep into midnight
I am awake and I know it. The moon is beside us
I can see it. There are stars

sometimes I dream and while dreaming
stars die. There is a boy gathering them
wrapping each in his shirt-sleeves. He travels the hillsides

waiting for even the tiniest breeze to stir the darkness,
the blackened pieces. His eyes become baskets of
deep blue straw. They fill with excitement and the fast
wind.

I saw his tiny hands stuffing night into his pockets
stuffing wire and screams into key-holes, pulling
the galaxies out. I remember the hillsides.

There used to be a dream here - and a god
But he is getting older and the stars lay down without him.
Only the night holds us still; breathing and becoming
children.

—Ken O'Connor

Watching The Ships Come In

Howard narrates
in his toothless fashion.

The elements of intrigue
overcome paranoia
in stunning ways;
I made his day
by opening my mouth,
ears and heart.

Rolling Top
in a fierce wind
isn't any harder than
doing it in a box-car.
Howard is flustered
by having a friend,
stiff from making his bed
on the side-walk under
the pier.

A slobbery lick
and a twist, puts his
pouch inside a pocket
lined with screw-top
bottles of booze.
A wheezing laugh takes
a side-wise look
to see what I see; comes up
with a match that won't
stay lit worth
a son-of-a-bitch.

The pack-sacking Hobo
asleep at the tracks
tries to extinguish
soggy hours spent
in 99 cent Port oblivion.
I understand. . .
A spare-change hustle
makes for
pleasant dreams. . .

A few words
hapless Howard,
before my train rolls out
(and this you know),
I loved you best
when you saw through
and broke me.
It should have been
me in your bed--
It should have been
me hugging you
on your bed
of side-walk cement.

Jesus, now
there was a man
I could have loved.

—*Jean M. Shannon*

What Might Be The Proper Fantasy

Flipping backwards through the New Yorker
my senses digest thoroughbred sports cars
red and riderless on an open green,
tall fitzgeraldian women wrapped
in russian sables and silk kimonos,
and a watch one wears when bidding
on a Van Gogh landscape.

This magazine is the culmination of
what might be the proper fantasy;
no honest, Victorian heartburn lust:
take-home chicken chased
down with frothy beer,
then a bra tossed over a chair
and a creaking, second-hand bed,

But rather the savor
of new leather seats
commixed with ambergris,
a gift of gold earrings
candle-glimmering over
a black evening dress,
and then, after the fruits de la mer,
some wiggling on a water-bed.

Yet, no matter how sordid or fancy
these are the same. . .

just more little deaths.

—*David Scott Lenton*

Reason For Bleeding

A saddened stranger died in my bed
Just this night.
Poetry performed in procession.
For the saddened stranger
Could not contain his love,
Share otherwise.

You might worry about my television
Being in the picture.
So amuse yourself.
I tell you I wore the black coat.
And I sunk the hammer
Into the skull.

As I laid there,
My head thick and flowing,
A remotely concerned woman
Stroked my pains.
Helped me to my desk.

9-77

—*Gary Russ*

100th Birthday

by Conley Smith

In the center of the room, surrounded by reporters and TV cameras, Bill Simpson lay in bed with a pair of tubes sticking out of his nostrils, staring at the ceiling above him, his pale face and sunken cheeks shining sweatless beneath the glare of a giant spotlight.

A man with a tape recorder shoved a microphone up to his face and shouted:

"In another hour you will have lived to see an entire century, Mr. Simpson. How do you feel about that? Are you nervous? Do you think you can hang on? What would you say was the most significant event of your life?"

"Quit shaking that frigging spotlight! You're spoiling the light on his face!"

"Mr. Simpson, how does it feel to have lived almost an entire century? What advice can you give our viewers out there on how to live a long life? What would you attribute your longevity to?"

"Mr. Simpson. I know you can't speak, but please answer me by shaking your head. Do you think you can cling to life for another hour, and what event of the past century stands out most vividly in your mind?"

"This is Frank Harvey for NBC News at the bedside of Bill Simpson, and—as you can see—there's a lot of pushing and shoving going on right now among the reporters and photographers here. Simpson's bed is literally surrounded by members of the press; people are shouting questions at him, and—just a few minutes ago—a brief scuffle between two reporters broke out right next to the patient's bed. There have been unconfirmed reports that one of the tubes leading to Simpson's nostrils was jarred loose during that scuffle, but the word now is that the tube was quickly reinserted into the nostril and that the patient suffered no loss of oxygen or permanent brain damage as was originally feared.

"Okay, I certainly hope that's the case. And standing next to me right now, I have Dr. Alexander Thurlough, Simpson's personal physician, who has agreed to answer a couple of questions for our home viewers. Dr. Thurlough. Let's jump right into the question that I'm sure is foremost on everyone's mind: How do you rate Simpson's chances of living to see the new century, and what insights can you shed on his present condition?"

"Well, Frank, barring a sudden heart attack, stroke, or blood clot, I'd rate the patient's chances of celebrating his 100th birthday as excellent. His temperature is a little above normal,

which is to be expected with that bright spotlight shining down on him. His blood pressure is holding steady. And all his vital signs are good, though—of course—he is still in a deep coma. I think he's going to make it."

"Thank you, doctor. Can Bill Simpson hang on for another fifty-five minutes? That's the question millions of Americans are asking themselves right now. You just heard one opinion. And we'll have the final answer for you right here in just a little less than one hour. This is Frank Harvey for NBC News at the deathbed, er, rather, the bedside of Bill Simpson in Las Vegas, Nevada. Now let's take a look at the most recent gambling figures. Steve, do you have anything new to report on your end?"

"Thank you, Frank. The bets are still pouring in, with right now those who are betting for Simpson to live to see the new century holding a slight edge over those betting he won't. Hold it. This just in. Muhammed Rabid Dabbadu—the famous Saudi Arabian sheik—has just bet a million dollars that Simpson will **not** make it. It's wild down here, Frank. We've got calls coming in from China, Africa, Russia, England, Mexico, you name it. The oddsmakers are still calling it too close to call. But one thing is certain, Frank: in about one hour, whether Bill Simpson lives or dies, one heck of a lot of money is going to change hands. This is Steve Mitchell for NBC News in the Long-Distance Gambling Room of the Las Vegas Hilton. Now let's jump back over to the hospital where Nancy Waters is preparing to interview Simpson's granddaughter. How's it going, Nancy?"

"Fine, Steve. As you can see, I'm sitting next to Ms. Lori Simpson, Bill Simpson's only surviving granddaughter and, in fact, the only surviving member of his family. Ms. Simpson. I know this is a very busy and important night for you, so I'll make my questions brief and to the point. How has all the publicity of the last two years affected you and your grandfather? Have your lives been changed, and if so, in what ways?"

"Oh, yes, Nancy. I would say our lives have definitely been changed by all the publicity. For one thing, we have a lot more money now. As you probably know, last year Grandpa signed a million-dollar advertising contract with the Dentu-Cement Corporation, which I believe is one of your network's major sponsors. Then he did a series of ads for a major laxative manufacturer. And, of course, we just sold the serial rights to his life story to *Modern Maturity* for another two million. So, yes, I would say that our lives have changed drastically in the last year."

"What about your grandfather's prediction that he'd live to see the twenty-first century? Did he do that on his own, or was it just something his press agent put him up to in order to attract attention?"

"Oh, no. That was entirely his own idea. He was born on New Year's Day, 1900, you know, and to live to see the whole century became sort of an obsession with him. 'I came into this world on New Year's Day, 1900,' he'd say. 'And I ain't a going out till I see the whole durn century.' That has been his motto for the past twenty years, ever since his 80th birthday. Of course, no one paid much attention to him until it started looking as if he might make it."

"Well, I know you must be anxious to return to your grandfather's bedside to wait out those final minutes, so I'll leave you with just one more question. What do you think your grandfather is thinking right now?"

"Of course, as you know, he has been in a coma for the last two weeks, the poor dear. But the doctor thinks he's still able to use his brain, and I think that right now he's just hoping and praying to the dear Lord that he can hang on for just another hour more so that all those people who had faith in him and who bet he would live to see the new century won't be disappointed. I'd be willing to bet that that's what he's thinking right this minute."

"Thank you, Ms. Simpson, for a very touching and insightful interview. That was Ms. Lori Simpson, the granddaughter of Bill Simpson, the man who right this minute is clinging to life, trying desperately to live to see his 100th birthday. He's got exactly forty-seven minutes to go. And, after this brief word from our sponsor, we'll be back to tell you if he makes it."

"What brand of denture paste does American's most famous senior citizen use? Dentu-Cement, of course."

"That's right. My name is Bill Simpson, and when you're trying to live to be a century old, like I am, you need the best denture paste money can buy. I use Dentu-Cement because it makes my dentures stick to my gums quickly, easily, without fuss, and without leaving a flowery after-taste."

"So next time you're in your local pharmacy, pick up a tube of Dentu-Cement—the denture paste of champions!"

"Frank Harvey here at the bedside of Bill Simpson. Before that brief word from our sponsor, we saw Nancy Waters interviewing Simpson's granddaughter. And, Nancy, I just want to say that if Bill Simpson is, indeed, thinking what his granddaughter said he's thinking, there's certainly no indication of it up here. He's still staring up at the ceiling with those tubes in his nose, looking pretty much like he's looked for the past two weeks. With exactly forty-two minutes left in the twentieth century, that's the situation here at the bedside of Bill Simpson in Las Vegas, Nevada. Now back to New York."

"Thank you, Frank. Looks like quite a happening out there in Las Vegas, doesn't it, Sue? And we'll have more live coverage of

Bill Simpson's dramatic quest to live to see the new century right after this important announcement from the makers of Dentu-Cement."

* * *

Look! He's trying to speak! He's trying to say something!"

"What's he saying, what's he saying?"

"Shut up and listen, for Christ's sake!"

"This is Frank Harvey for NBC News, and as you can see, right now I'm trying to . . . ough . . . push my way through a mass of reporters to the bedside of Bill Simpson, who with five minutes to go until the new century, may have just come out of his two-week long coma. Let's see if we can get one of our cameras up to his face and see how he looks."

"What are you trying to say, Mr. Simpson? Do you have a message for all of your fans out there, is that it?"

"You've got just a little less than five minutes to go until the new century, Mr. Simpson. What exactly is going through your mind at this time? What's it feel like to be nearly a hundred years old?"

Lori Simpson was sitting in the lobby, watching the commotion on closed-circuit TV, now and then glancing nervously at a nearby clock.

"Gee, I hope he makes it," she said, staring at a close-up of her grandfather getting smashed in the face with a microphone.

"Do those tubes coming out of your nose bother you, Mr. Simpson? Or have you gotten used to them?"

"Four minutes and counting."

"Watch that frigging spotlight!"

"If you had to choose one event, one event of the last century as the most significant event of your life, Mr. Simpson, what event would that be?"

"What's your favorite TV show?"

"Do you really use Dentu-Cement?"

"What thoughts went through your mind as you lay there in a coma for two weeks, Mr. Simpson?"

"It is exactly three minutes to midnight. If Bill Simpson can hang on for just three more minutes he'll become the first man in modern history to have lived through an entire century. I'm still pushing my way through the crowd, trying to get within interview range . . ."

In the middle of the mob, a cameraman for ABC had an extension cord wrapped around the neck of a CBS light monitor. Two reporters were smashing their fists into each other's face. And a third reporter had jammed the head of his microphone into Bill Simpson's mouth.

"Answer me, God damnit!" he shouted. "Answer me, or I'll pull those frigging tubes out of your nose!"

Another reporter climbed onto Simpson's bed and started jumping up and down on his chest and slapping the old man across the face.

"Would you say the quality of American life has generally improved or deteriorated in the last 100 years, Mr. Simpson?" he screamed.

"Two minutes and counting."

A man with a portable TV camera scurried up the scaffold at the foot of Simpson's bed and climbed out onto the giant spotlight, hoping to get a better look at the patient. Another reporter followed him. The giant light wobbled precariously for a moment, tipped forward, and came crashing down onto Simpson's bed, exploding on top of the old man in a shower of glass and sparks.

"Wait a minute, folks! Just a second ago, you saw it, a giant spotlight came crashing down onto Simpson. There's a minute and thirty seconds left. Is he alive or dead? Judging from the force of the explosion, I'd say it would be a miracle if he's alive. They're clearing away the debris right now. And while a doctor checks his pulse, let's look at an instant replay of what happened.

"There you see it—in slow motion. A reporter—it looks like it was Harvey Kormack of the Associated Press—climbed the spotlight scaffold at the foot of Simpson's bed. He was followed by Perry Stevens of United Press International. A brief scuffle ensued as the pair jockeyed for position. And then—there, watch the scaffold begin to tip—the structure landed directly on top of Simpson's bed. And there you see the explosion as the 10,000 volt spotlight exploded on top of the old man, instantly electrocuting Kormack and Stevens.

"Okay, we're back to live coverage now. It's exactly one minute before midnight. There you see Dr. Thurlough checking Simpson's heart beat. And is Simpson alive? No! The doctor has given the thumbs down signal! Bill Wallace Simpson has failed in his quest to see the new century. With one minute to go Bill Simpson has been pronounced dead by his personal physician. We'll be back with the details after this important message from one of our sponsors."

"What kind of man uses Prune Essense? The kind of man who can't be bothered with those sweet-tasting syrups and gimmicky powders. The kind of man who wants his laxative to work right the first time, without any messy preparation or flowery after-taste. The kind of man who wants a man's laxative.

"Bill Simpson—America's most famous senior citizen—is that kind of man."

"That's right. My name is Bill Simpson, and I use Prune Essense because it cleans my system out safely and effectively, without leaving a flowery after-taste. And when you're trying to live to be a century old, like I am, it's important to have a laxative you can depend on. So take a hint from old Bill Simpson and pick up a jar of Prune Essense—the laxative of champions!"

"This is Frank Harvey for NBC News in the hospital room of Bill Simpson, who—just a moment ago—was killed by a falling spotlight. It's a real mess in here, folks. In the commotion after the accident, four reporters for the *National Enquirer* were trampled to death. A CBS light monitor was strangled with his own extension cord. And, of course, the two reporters who caused the giant spotlight to fall were electrocuted right in front of our national television audiences. To repeat the main story: Bill Simpson passed away with just less than a minute to go before his 100th birthday. Now let's go downstairs to Nancy."

"Thanks, Frank. I'm sitting next to an obviously distraught Lori Simpson, the only surviving granddaughter of the late Bill Simpson. Ms. Simpson. I know this is a sad time for you, but what thoughts are going through your mind right now, and what exactly did you think as you saw the spotlight fall on your grandfather?"

"Well, Nancy, mainly I feel a tremendous sense of sadness for all those people who lost money on my grandpa, and I just want them to know that if Grandpa were alive right now, he'd feel exactly the same way. That's what kind of man he was. In answer to your second question, I must say that I was surprised to see that light fall on him. I just wasn't expecting it to end that way."

"Thank you, Ms. Simpson. And we'll be right back with more gruesome coverage of Mr. Simpson's unfortunate death right after this important announcement from the makers of Dentu-Cement."

Chimera

Oh, midnight moth of passage,
who moves around the eaten clock,
its face lime-washed, distorted legs,
your past, a jarred creature,
captured on a twig and brought half way
through incubation.
Its code had nearly broken,
before the glass limbo,
imprisoning, what wings!

And you would fly away
on what has never been.

—*Candace Favilla*

The Mountains

in a courtroom of rock
a jury of trees
whispers and nods
in the prosecuting wind

—*Jeff Everist*

I Have Seen Other Decembers

I have seen other Decembers
like this one:

have watched the same moon
grow fat and disappear
and felt the razor-cut
of clear-cold ices
tear my skin;
have closed my eyes
to blinding-bright reflection
from snow too white to touch,
and have kissed the frost-perfection
on my window,
and counted it enough;
and it will be enough
until the frozen dust
inside my veins
erupts and flows,
erupts and flows
and melts this wasteland,
and makes steaming pools
from mountain-drifts of snow.

—*Alayne Ronnenberg*

From "Day by Day"

The swallow leaves and with it summer
And I, I tell myself, will pass on too. . .
But may there stay of this love which rips me
More mark than a brief dulling
If out of hell I arrive at some quiet. . .

No more can summer bring me rages,
Nor spring induce its yearning;
Fade away, autumn,
With your fool's glory:
For a naked spoiled desire, winter
Spreads out the tenderest season.

—Giuseppe Ungaretti
Translation from Italian
by *Stomna*

On Reading *La Vita Nuova*

Who was the useful girl at church between
The amorous Dante and his blessed love?
She is the one who interests me, the screen
For lovers, beauteous but unspoken of.
She left the city. His God in pilgrim dress
Beside the Arno told him of another
To gaze upon that no one there might guess
The hallowed one he loved above all other.
Then were the ladies avid in their chatter,
Flocking, giggling, and derisive as they sought
Whose beauty next his eloquence would flatter,
Not knowing his heart's sails were set and taut. . .
Did those beguiled young ladies feel abused
When Dante told they weren't enjoyed but used?

—*Stomna*

Empty Bottle

On a bench cold of iron
not wood splintered warm
A wrinkled brow of a body sleeps
inside a moss-green suit
of cobwebs and dust
A slumbering cocoon lost in the vat
of fermented dreams. . . .
No smiles survive
on that stubble-gray battlefield
The newspaper soles
that once clung
to unblinking street lamps
for salvation
Now, only quench the thirst
of a moment draining,
into a burgundy grave. . . .

—*Melvin Yocum*

When The Power Was Taken Away

Cavewoman birthing
hurting, vulnerable
drybones creaked
germinating
future generations.

It was then
the power
was seized
by a hunched-over shadow
clothed in animal skins
and dung.

—*Marialyce Hawke*

Cahill

by K. Patrick Conner

She was an Indian all right, but she acted like maybe it was somebody else's fault. Well I didn't have anything to do with it. But that's what made her so hard to figure; she was so goddamned indignant about it. Wore her blood like a purple heart. Well you couldn't blame me for it, any of it. Sometimes she was this way, sometimes that. Sometimes she was venomous and mean, and sometimes she was quiet and damn near compliant. You never knew. She was impossible to figure.

I leaned against the bar, then shifted the receiver to my other ear and waited for her to answer. I turned around to see if anybody was listening, but there was nobody else even in the Missoula Club, except Grady the bartender and he was at the other end, washing glasses. Behind him, through the small window at the top of the wall, I could see the bar's red neon sign.

You never knew about Theresa. She was tough and hard and swung between her moods the way she swung between men. Now she was living with some new one, the poor bastard. But maybe that's what it took. She was an Indian all right: shrewd and dumb at the same time. It wasn't easy to get out of Ronan and off the reservation, I knew that, and maybe you just did what you had to do. That was all right with me. She could do what she wanted with her life. Unless it crossed mine. That was the one thing she never counted on, the punch she never saw coming. *I understood her.* I had to shake my head when I thought about that poor bastard living with her now. What the hell did he know? And it was even money she hadn't even told him about me, though he'd find out soon enough.

"Hello," I said. I wanted for her to recognize my voice.

"What do you want?"

"I'm coming over," I said.

"Like hell you are."

I smiled. That was the way she was, but I knew it. I knew her too well. I told her I'd be over in a few minutes.

"Like hell you will."

I turned around and looked at the framed portraits of old baseball teams that covered the whole east wall. The pictures were old and grainy, made me think about the picture I had in my wallet. It was a picture of a bunch of us in Saigon, in some bar. I was hard to see, though, because I was in the back and it was dark, but it was me all right. You could tell. I felt like nailing it up on the wall but I didn't know where the rest of the guys were now, except O'Neal who was in the hospital in San Diego, and of

course the ones who died. The rest just disappeared once we got back. I wanted to remember them so I couldn't very well give up the picture. What if I moved? What if I got on at the mill? I'd want it to show around.

"No way you're coming over," she said.

"I'll be right there."

"Like hell."

I hung up. I didn't feel like listening to her bellyaching over the phone. And she would. That much was for sure.

"What did she say?" Grady asked, as I walked down to him and pulled myself onto a stool.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out the five-dollar bill that was balled up at the bottom. It was beginning to fall apart. "Give me another, Grady."

"Forget her, Cahill."

I laughed at him, then told him to get me a drink. Grady was a good man, but at forty years old he acted like he was eighty. He'd been that way as long as I'd known him, and for the four years I'd been back he'd been passing out advice like keno tickets. Thought he was an expert on everything. Right.

As he reached down for the bottle of Early Times in the rack, I looked at myself in the mirror behind the trays of glasses. My hair curled down over my forehead and was still wet from the snow. I brushed it back with my hand. It was getting easier to see the bald spots that grew back at each temple. Thigh burns, that's what Theresa called them. I had to laugh at that. She could be pretty funny when she felt like it.

Grady gave me my drink and change and I took a sip. "There's no bourbon in this," I complained.

"There's enough, Cahill. I'm closing up."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"That's your last one, Cahill."

"What kind of bullshit is that?" I was only kidding him, giving him a hard time. He knew it.

He shrugged it off and asked me if I'd heard anything about getting on at the mill.

"Nothing," I said. I took another sip.

"When are they going to let you know?"

"Didn't say."

He nodded. That was one good thing about Grady—it didn't take much to get him to understand something. You didn't have to tell him something maybe ten times before he got it through his head. He tossed his towel down to the other end of the bar, near the phone, then turned back to me. "You want to know what I think, Cahill?"

"What's that?"

"Forget her."

I took a drink. The ice tumbled down against my upper lip as I milked out the last of the bourbon. I set the glass down. "Give me another, Grady."

"Too late. I'm closed."

"C'mon, damnit."

He shook his head.

Sometimes he kind of pissed me off, but there wasn't any use arguing with him. He had his job to do, and I had mine. Still I never could figure where he got the license to stick his nose into my business. What the hell did he know? I mean what the hell did he know about Indians, how to handle an Indian like Theresa?

"Let's go," he said. "That's it. I'm locking up."

I stared at him for a minute, stared him down so he'd know I could still handle myself, so he'd know I'd heard him. Then I laughed. "Sure, Grady." I stood up. "I don't want to argue with you, don't want to get in your way."

"Go home, Cahill."

"Sure, Grady. I'm going home."

I pushed outside. The sidewalk was covered with a couple inches of fresh snow, although a trail of slush had been stomped down the middle. I followed the trail to the corner, then stopped and turned up the collar of my jacket. I looked up and watched the snow twist down through the streetlight. It was cold and my leg began to ache like hell.

I crossed Front Street and walked down to the parking lot. A smooth sheet of snow rose up the levee wall and I plowed through it until I got to the top. I looked down at the river. It was black. The wind came out of the east, from the mouth of Hellgate Canyon, and swept along the river's surface. I hunched up my shoulders to keep it from slashing across my face, then looked out to the shallows in the middle of the river, to the island formed by the Clark Fork peeling away into two channels. It looked like a good place to freeze to death.

I turned away from the river and started back down the levee, across the snow to the iron stairs that rose up the back of the Wilma Theater and led to the Higgins Bridge. I stopped at the top of the stairs and leaned over the rail to look at the parking lot. It was almost empty—only two or three cars and they could have been abandoned. I turned around to see if the back door of the theater was locked. It was. The last show must have ended a couple hours ago. Although they never used to, they always locked the back door now. One night last winter I needed a place to get some sleep; it was freezing that night. Just some quick

sleep. It wasn't like I was breaking in. What could you steal from a theater? Popcorn? I shook my head. All I needed that night was a place to get out of the cold, to warm up my leg and hands. Was that too much to ask? I must have fallen asleep. Then the next thing I knew I was in the back of a squad car and then I was in a cell. Christ. Anyway, they'd locked the door tonight.

I walked out onto Higgins Avenue, crossed the bridge, then turned down Third Avenue and headed past the train station. My leg pounded with each step and sent a shaft of pain up into the small of my back. But it wasn't too far and didn't take me long to get there. I could see she was home by the light in her bedroom in the back. The house was small and the foundation seemed to be slipping. My breath rose in front of me.

I walked up the porch steps and knocked on the door. I waited, then knocked again. Finally a light came on. "What do you want?" she snapped from behind the door.

"Let me in, Theresa."

"No."

"Come on, Theresa. Let me in."

"Get out of here."

"I'm freezing."

"Tough shit, Cahill."

I shook my head. That was just the way Theresa was. I should have known, should have expected this. I told her I was coming inside. "Just for a minute," I said. "I want to talk."

"I've got a gun, Cahill."

Jesus! I jumped out of the doorway and flattened myself against the wall. What the hell was she doing with a gun? What the hell was Theresa doing with a gun? My heart thundered up into my throat. But . . . then I almost had to laugh. Theresa didn't have any gun. Seriously, what would Theresa be doing with a gun? I spun back to the door, brought up my leg and kicked it hard, just below the doorknob. It gave easily, splintering away from the jamb, then abruptly it stopped. That's what I mean: shrewd and dumb at the same time. She was standing too close and the door swung into her—she crumpled to the floor.

I rushed inside and closed the door behind me. She was sprawled face down on the floor. Her back and legs were the color of coffee. I smiled. She was beautiful. I asked if she were all right. Her black hair spread across her shoulders. She began to cry. I walked over to the fireplace to warm my hands and leg on a fire that wasn't there. My face stung from the cold and the wind. "Where's the fire, Theresa? You should have built a fire."

She rose to her hands and knees, then rocked back onto her heels. Already the tears had stopped. I knew they wouldn't last long. She stood up and picked up her blanket and wrapped it

around herself. Her eyes were as black as the river.

"You've lost weight," I said.

She didn't say anything.

"I said you look like you've lost some weight."

"I've gained weight."

She had to argue, driven to disagreement as she was driven to love. I told her again that I thought she'd lost some weight.

"Get out of here," she hissed.

I stared at her for a minute to let her settle down. She must still have been sore from getting cracked by the door. My fingers felt like they were burning but I knew it was just the blood beginning to move again. "I'm clean now, Theresa."

"You're a liar."

"I'm clean."

"My ass."

I shook my head, then let it drop. "You have anything to drink?"

"No."

I said her name slowly, soberly: "Theresa."

"What?"

"I'm telling you I'm clean. It'll be different this time."

"Get out, Cahill."

I shook my head. "What do you have to drink?"

"Nothing."

"Doesn't he drink?"

"Not like you."

"What the hell does that mean?"

She didn't answer me.

"Where is he?" I asked. "Has he got any bourbon in the cupboard? Does he keep it above the refrigerator like I used to?"

"He lives here," she said, biting off each word sharply. "So you'd better get your ass out before he gets back."

"Damn it, Cahill."

"Where is he?"

"Get out." She walked over to the door, the blanket trailing along the floor behind her.

"No," I said.

"I want you out."

"Can I kiss you?"

She stopped and glared at me.

"I want to kiss you."

"Get out."

"I'm clean now. I'm clean." I wasn't just saying it either—I meant it. "It'll be different this time." I hadn't come over for nothing. The mill was going to let me know any day now. Once I

got on I'd work every day and I'd come home to Theresa. See? Better than the bum she was living with now. Where was he? It was the middle of the goddamned night.

"Get out, Cahill."

"I want a kiss." I thought about just taking it, whether she liked it or not.

She shook her head slowly from side to side, stared down at the floor. Her hair hung down over her face. "You'll leave then, if I let you kiss me?" She looked up.

"Why can't I just have a kiss?"

She walked over to the fireplace and stared down at the mounds of ash.

"Why not?"

"All right." She turned to face me. Her hands were at her sides, as listless as the grey and black blanket that had been nailed up to cover the window. She stood straight. Her cheekbones were sharp.

"Forget it," I said.

"Kiss me, Cahill. Then get out."

"Forget it."

"Do it!"

"I don't want it anymore."

"Then get out."

I walked over to the couch and slumped down into it. I rubbed my leg. I could feel her watching me. It still ached bad from the cold. I told her again that it'd be different this time.

"It isn't going to be anything," she said.

"It'll be different."

"Get out."

"Do you have any cigarettes?"

"What for?"

"I want one."

She *had* to give me a cigarette. She walked across the room, then into her bedroom. I thought about following her. I could just take her and settle this thing, but her bedroom was small and cold if you closed the door. It was warmer in the living room. She came back and gave me the cigarette, then lit one for herself and tossed me the book of matches. I lit mine and took a long drag.

"I'm clean," I said.

"Don't, Cahill."

"I mean it."

"You've got to leave, Cahill. You've got to leave, now, please."

"It wasn't my fault, really. I couldn't help it but now it's over." Again I thought about just taking her. I could drag her back into the bedroom. She'd fight. She'd fight all right. That

was just the way she was. I couldn't believe she didn't have anything to drink. Maybe she thought she was moving up in the world. That was a good one. Maybe she thought she was going to marry the governor. I wanted to laugh. She had no sense of herself. I told her I'd take that kiss now.

"No," she said.

Once we just lay there, on her bed. She looked at my leg, ran her fingers down the scar, the length of my thigh. She stared at it, clinically, her eyes working hard to determine its origin. What happened? she asked me. Piece of shrapnel, I told her. Anti-personnel mine. But that wasn't true: I didn't much feel like telling her I'd done it in a car wreck in San Diego. And what did it matter to her anyway? She believed me, that's what mattered. She was lucky I hadn't come back in a body bag. I'd told her about body bags. I'd showed her my picture and pointed out the ones who hadn't made it. She was lucky, damn lucky.

I stood up and walked over to her. "Let's go," I said.

Tears ran down her face. I glared down at her.

"What do you think you are?" I shouted. "Get up!" I reached down and pulled her out of the chair. She trembled as if she were cold. I tore the blanket off her. She didn't fight, didn't move.

All she wanted was to be treated right—maybe last time I was wrong. I could feel my throat swell. She cried harder but still didn't move. All she wanted was to be treated right, *not* like she was some goddamn Indian whore, and that was all right by me. I covered both her breasts with my hands. They were small and tight and broad, like the women in Saigon. I unclasped my belt. I went down to my knees, then reached in and wedged my hands between her legs and forced them apart.

She broke away. Before I could grab her she ran back into the bedroom and slammed the door. It sealed like the door of a vault. I wanted to laugh: if I could blow down the front door, I could sure as hell break down this one. I pressed against it and listened. It sounded like she was choking, coughing, phlegm snapping in her throat.

"Theresa?"

She didn't answer.

I reached down to the doorknob. "I'm coming in," I said.

Suddenly I was spun around. Instinctively I tried to duck but he caught me, knocked me down and then kicked me. Pain shot up into the base of my skull and my mouth was full of blood. I gagged it out. She jerked open the bedroom door as he stomped down on my hand, then kicked me in the small of my back. Then he kicked me again. She tried to stop him when he kicked me in the back of my knee. "This is the one?" he shouted.

"He didn't do anything," she cried, louder now and broken by sobs.

"This is your junkie soldier-boy?"

"No," she cried.

He grabbed me, jerked me off the floor, then ran me out the door. I fell as soon as he let go and tumbled down the steps.

The snow had stopped. I lay there a while. Then I got up, steadied myself on the railing. All I'd had a chance to see was that he was an Indian too. Figured.

I kept low for a couple days after that, kept out of sight until things came down from the boil. I walked down to the Orange Street bridge and crossed back over the Clark Fork, and I spent the night in the shell of an old Chevy station wagon ditched just downriver from the bridge. It wasn't too bad there: it was dry and somebody had been there before. Inside was a blanket and some newspapers and some plastic spoons, though I didn't feel like eating anything.

During the days I called the mill and tried to warm up. There was no word yet at the mill. I figured I had some pull there as a veteran, but they just weren't hiring, at least that's what they said. I could wait. I'd get on soon enough, and then I'd get a place to live. I wrestled a bottle of aspirin out of the county offices and that helped some, but god my mouth was sore from Theresa's Indian, felt like somebody was using a sledge hammer on my teeth. My leg was sore too and my back was stiff, but that was something I was used to.

After a couple days I went by the Missoula Club to see Grady. I sat at the bar and in the mirror I could see that my face was swollen and purpled and looked pretty bad. I told Grady what had happened and he couldn't believe it, which showed how little he really knew about Indians and their ways. And I told him I was clean now. Seriously. I told him about the puking and the sweating and the itching, and how the itching was the worst. More than anything else, the itching was the worst—like a million small ants that live under your skin and are alive and always crawling and moving.

But something was wrong. Grady didn't feel much like talking. He acted busy and hurried even though there were only a couple of old-timers and me in the bar. He pulled a twenty-dollar bill out of the cash register and slid it across the counter to me. I told him I'd pay him back.

"Yeah, I know," he said.

"I didn't ask for it."

He nodded.

I told him that I thought I'd be getting on at the mill pretty soon and he told me he didn't want me coming in anymore. I

asked what he meant. "We're friends, Grady."

"I know, Cahill, but you can't come in here anymore."

"Why not?"

He shook his head. "Just take the twenty," he said.

"I said I'd pay you back."

"Just take it, Cahill."

I nodded and I looked at him, then I left.

I told myself that pretty soon things would change. The winter couldn't last forever, the mill would have to let me know. Theresa would come back. Or maybe I'd just blow—just disappear and forget this place. Missoula wasn't the only goddamned town in the country. I could go down to San Diego where it was warm and full of beaches and talk to O'Neal. Still, though, I wanted what was mine. Nothing more, nothing less. I wanted what was mine. I'm clean now—so how long is it going to take?

I crossed the street and pushed into Red's and told the bartender to pour me a beer. I shoved Grady's twenty onto the bar. He spit down at the floor, then looked at me as if I were dying or something. "Give me a beer," I said. I pushed the twenty at him. He stared back at me. I pointed a finger at my face and said, "It really doesn't hurt."

Contributors' Notes . . .

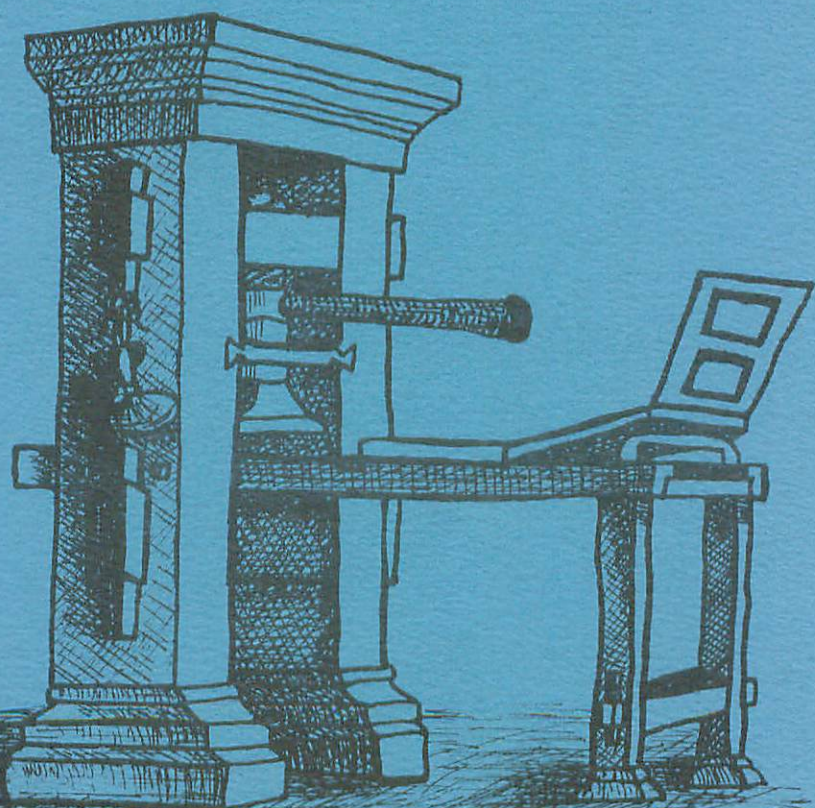
K. Patrick Conner has no prior felonies and plays a mean first base for the "Pests." **Jeff Everist** says he is a "transplanted mid-westerner, aspiring writer, wage earner, husband, father, all around O.K. guy whose major disappointments in life include premature baldness, TV, and the fact that the music that meant so much to my generation is now just as passe to my kids as Glenn Miller was to me at their age." **Candice Favilla** is currently studying poetry under George Keithley at Chico State and creative writing at Butte. She says, "I am not working towards a degree, but towards growth." **Chris Gulbransen** was born in Chicago and raised in Palo Alto. He is now 30 years old and teaching in Gridley. **Marialyce Hawke** is presently working in the capacity of publisher/editor of *Reflections and Images Magazine*. She says, "To augment my knowledge and to touch bases with my own writing skills I am also participating in George Keithley's graduate writing class. I have been actively involved in the fine arts and have earned an MFA. After teaching eight years and exhibiting professionally for twelve I turned inward and rediscovered poetry. Now I write." **S. P. Johnson** is a graduate of CSUC's English Department ("many moons ago," she says, "before Dr. Lams' hair was gray"). She believes that unattainable goals are the key to her success as a neurotic, and claims that her motivating force in life is to be published by the *New Yorker* magazine. "I turned to writing," she says, "when I realized I could no longer afford my counselor, but my typewriter was paid off." **Phillip McGowan** says, "I am 22 years old, and a long-time resident. Some of the writers who have influenced me greatly are T. S. Eliot, Thomas Merton, and John Haines." **Susan M. McVicker** is 25 years old, a Sociology major, originally from Ontario, California ("in this life"). She has studied under Gary Thompson and now studies under Deborah Gregor. **Kenneth O'Connor** says, "I am uninterested in convention and tired of illusory social expectations. When I catalyze a poem I am ready for anything; I experience the growth wide-eyed and willing to go wherever the poem wants to go. I would still be hanging

from some distant cliff, had it not been for our contemporary poets teaching me how to let go." **Don Pack** is a student at Chico State but calls Iowa home. He is unsure if writing poetry is a very lucrative endeavor, therefore he hopes to hook up with the railroad someday. Currently, he finds more pleasure in throwing a good Frisbee than he does in throwing a good phrase. **Marcia Pennington** became interested in Macedonian poetry and folk tales when she was an exchange professor at the University of Skopje in the spring of 1977. **Gary Russ** is currently caretaker of "the" nuthouse, *Madison Bear Garden*. He says he is "aiming to leave Chico soon in favor of the road . . . a poem for each town. Thanks to Gary Thompson and those in Chico who listen." **Alix Schwartz** says, "I am in my junior year here at CSU Chico. My major is English and I have a special interest in Russian and Japanese literature. I have one daughter, age six. We live on a small farm in Durham. **Conley Smith** will receive his Master's in English this summer and has been a graduate teaching assistant at Chico State. He also writes a weekly column for the *Butte County Bugle*. **Melvin Yocum** is a pseudo senior at Chico State.

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