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EDITORS

Terri Stone

Brian Daldorph

Anne Norton

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C. O'Wynne

The month of June

It was a stormy night when Catherine Mary
met the Madonna.
Strong spirit in the heavy air, teasing
passions so unnatural.
Bringing them to life, their new beginning.
Emergence
or maybe a realization, clear and positive.
Finally, passions once unnatural overwhelm them.
Together at last, they are lovers.

Christine M. Maier

silhouette

somehow i must write
of peripheral events
form an intact boundary
outlining the shape
of the central truth.

Brenda Stalcup

opus 27

through child
through woman
same old song
was playing
and you take
that worn-out melody
and weave rainbows through it
my life is colored
with flourescent crayons
it never stops
just keeps on running into eternity
and i don't know
what has brought me this far
but i keep dancing

There you stood
Sun-circles around your bright hair
Soft the deep eyes
Soft the gentle smile
I never hoped to see again.
And I, with arms full
with heart empty
I could not move
From grief to joy
To meet one I was still grieving

Andrew Bendelow

To Jill

The forest of your room would dance on certain nights.
There were:

 fragrant, full, warmly brown greens,
 smells of rich fecundity, promise . . .

And when you'd burn into them,
those fires in your effervescent, eyesy smiles
would blaze, my sun. Oh--
one could do worse
than to swing with a sprite.

I
could have loved you more
(now I know that), and forever,
had not life pains begun--
reminders of the poet
"in the world," and all . . .

But still,
and actually, I think,
forever--
 I shall miss your spieltreib
 play-life world.

I turn now,
bid adieu a l'innocence.

Mike Pinkowski

Let's Get Pacific

This morning I read a bit of Passages,
mulling over my predictable life crises
with a cheese pastry and cinnamon-tinged coffee.
"As it should be," I thought;
stocking feet propped on the seat opposite,
coat draped over them,
toes wiggling happily.
On the jukebox: some country tune
with girl singers,
a boy moaning,
light Latin percussion dancing around the problem.

Then your mother walks in,
featuring a lime green pants-suit
and the smell of booze on her breath.
Mentions my receding hairline,
relates your ambitions,
solicits a recommendation for a tart.
"I've come here to sober up,"
she says,
"and here I find you."

She offers a penny for my thoughts;
I hold out for the price of a tip.
"How exactly," I wonder,
"Does your daughter plan to ruin my life?"

Graham K. Rogers

The Strands of Cypress

I

After our humming-bird hours;
back on the carousel, a fading green
ring-mark on one finger: home to
my narrow cell; I blame, you blame,
he she or it blames; qui est là,
qui est là? The sunshine of Dachau
became night on the staircases
at Heidelberg where he and I
met broad Australian girls: force
seven for culture-shock. Repeat,
repeat. Jugular politics -
trace the Armageddon-finger
when a point is made.
Lente, lente, curite equis nocti.
There could be silence.

II

I hear bored cleverness
from an adjacent room
punctuating non-stop
music beating outside:
a tale whose every word
threatens eternal slaughter -
we can reckon worlds out of
existence while cups stay
on our table for days.
"Fromm talks about the individual
in society while he . . ." while we
live squalidly.
"I had a real phobia when I was
a teenager . . ." Coprophagia?
Can reality take over after all?
"Poet" he whispered with a smile
looking at the marks on the page;
unfocussed on his character-
assassination, compliment
to his short-sightedness.

III

Guten Abend meine Damen
und Herren, unfasten your belts
and ignite your cigarettes so
the world comes to join us again.
Oh my prophetic . . .
Where have you led me now at last?
What house is this?

IV

You write today of Ilkley Moor,
hoping to catch the last dregs of
stale memories in the sunshine;
but rain came, and while I read you
telephoned. For ten minutes we
wallowed in the luxury of
saying nothing, then you prepared
for bed as I watched the sun go
down. My glass is dry - shall we pray
for more red wine to share, unharmed
by the four horsemen? Drunkenly
on jade base the shade sits casting
crooked shadows like pearls to swine.
The dish ran away, ran away, ran
away, the dish ran away far too
soon.

Bruce McComiskey

Her Vampire Heart, or
Tasteless Icy Residue

her vampire heart
drinks love that oozes
in my veins
as a child sucks juice
from a snow-cone
leaving only tasteless
icy residue

she swears she'll love
me all her life
but life for her
can never end

then should i stay
till all's been milked
from my mere mortal soul

or fire the silver bullet
and pound the stake of holly
till her selfish love flows thick
as honey from its comb

Gerry Weber

X-Lovers Request to God

"It's time!
All undone is done.
I'm ready now, let it come to me."

"It's too late, your time has passed
Think hard, it was yours
but you were too busy doing."



Brian Daldorph

the tower
novembre

Cher frère,

Premièrement, my thanks for your latest. Fascinated, très intrigué was I hear about ton concept nouveau -- aptly titled "Mind Games." And though I wish you bon chance! with marketing 'said jeu d'esprit, don't you think that it might be a trifle, how shall I say, elevated (élevé) for the dullen proletariat, absorbed as they are with trivial pursuits? Mais encore, bon chance!

Your idée brought to mind a recent happening, the ramifications of which are even now nicely multiplying like antibodies to ennui. Are you sitting comfortably? Thus it began.

Bicycling down Division Street towards Twin-town the other day, intent on purchasing the maestro's latest, Correspondences (heartily recommended, though no doubt you already cherish a copy), I was musing on les belles lettres from mes deux amours which had arrived together that very morning. Though they were sent from different continents and their senders had never met, ces lettres jolies came to me with envelopes touching; both were postmarked November 11. I left them unopened, en tête à tête. Later, as I ascended the creaky staircase to "the tower" (you must visit someday, truly you must), correspondence and Correspondences in hand, the thought stuck: Am I involved in some lovely conspiracy?

Les écrivains thanked me for birthday gifts. I had posted les cadeaux identiques (some coppery trinket of affection as I recall), this duplication brought about in part by haste of dispatch, and in part because I was idly curious in responses to my petty generosity, perhaps as a sophisticated variation on "she-loves-me, she-loves-me-not" (incidentally, a game I play on the creaky staircase several times each day -- with ineluctable success!). Perhaps I was hoping that this ploy might suggest comparable degrees of affection -- who knows? Anyway, whatever my intent, both letters thanked me nicely, brought me "up to date" with "news," inquired after my health and happiness, wished me well.

Later that afternoon, with dusk smudging the tower's skylight, I was delving into the labyrinthine unworld of Correspondences when a strange thought entered my mind like a nervous messenger to the tower. 'Said person, eyes down, hat in hand, mumbled, coughed, handed me a note, shuffled as I read: "Would it be possible to manage correspondences so that two relationships appeared exactly similar" (Janus with identical faces! Not an eyelash of difference!), "with neither of the recipients aware of the other?" My friend, knowing your mind as I do, I sense your surprise and

joy at this intriguing proposition!

Of course, it is quite easy to satisfy the baser aspects of this beguiling premise in a tediously practical manner -- as any of the many bigamists of this schizophrenic world could testify (although, you can be sure, they would rather not) -- but to clone communicative which two mothers would claim as their own -- this would be, I think you'll agree, a triumph of imaginative genius, genetic engineering at its finest! And unlike the bigamist who wishes, for shame, to erase the lies he uses, I should treasure the written evidence of each step of the game. In fact, the evidence would be the game, for writing -- the visibly invisible, a thing but nothing -- creates the perfect other world of "game" in which pure elements might harmlessly combat beyond the frictions of base realities. Cher frère, my own Glass Bead Game, quarantined in the glass-house of language! And I -- Magister Ludi!

Needless to say, I realized immediately that even though initial moves might be rather easy, I would have to employ toute ma finesse to provide the basis for elaborate strategies later in the game. To play -- Correspondences! -- I would have to craft those generic phrases which might conceivably apply to both recipients so that each would read my words, convinced de bonne foi! The tiniest variation, the slightest suspicion of artifice by either recipient, failure to respond correctly to a pertinent issue: the game would end, I would confess all (precipitating, no doubt, accusations of "playing with affections" or somesuch nonsense, still so damning, even in this supposedly post-Romantic age).

My friend, the strange thought, at first so painfully uneasy in the shadowy reaches of the tower, was beginning to make itself very much at home, thank-you. But after awhile, delighted as I was by this exhilarating digression, I was drawn back to les Correspondences originale, drifting in its darkling depths until sleep's mist blurred its letters. And so, to --

dream. After many years, they meet and in unison exclaim:

"THE OTHER WOMAN!"

They are, of course, both correct. And as they glare at each other, fearsome felines, poised for pouncing, from a hole in the wall, I -- agent provocateur, now the unworthy prize of the combatants -- watch the dreadful scene, squeaking:

"please, if i might explain--it was all a--a silly game--"

Oblivious to their master's timid entreaties my wild pets stalk and spit their spite; belladonna eyes flash. The reek of singed fur clogs my throat.

"I knew about you long ago!"

"There was nothing to know! Our relationship was common knowledge!"

"Quite common! Indeed!"

"please--if you'll give me a moment--it was an awful--"

"SHUT UP!" On this they agree. The gadfly swatted. Feline ferocities recommence.

"Anyway, it's not what you think between us. It's even more!"

"It would have to be for him to keep up with you."

Horrified, helpless, I watch lepidopterists lunge, kniving with needles. I consider intervening; I am readily dissuaded by glint of claws, gnash of eyes --

Mon ami, cher frère, I feel your terror. But -- rest easy! At this moment I was awoken from my nightmare by the postman's cheery whistling, "How d'you do!", the clattering of the letter-box (verily, 'twas one of yours!). Release, my friend, release from o'erhasting guilt! And so, puffy-eyed but light-headed, cleansed by morning light, I consigned my dream to journal; Faustus forewarned.

Respecting the prophecy of my vision of the night (in truth, it needed no Joseph to interpret it), I resolved to cease correspondence with mes deux amours, at least until dust, as they say, had settled. This resolution held firm for most of the day as the dark forces of Correspondences occupied my mind with tantalizing battles. But as evening gathered around "the tower" I was just in time to catch the late-post. Nestling within envelopes mailed to different continents -- deux lettres identiques! Naturellement, neither mentioned the strange visitor or the dream. Correspondences, in earnest, had begun.

And so, my old friend, I wait on responses. What shall be the consequences of my duplicity? Je ne sais pas. I have not the slightest inkling, only the humble hope that it (whatever "it" be!) shall prove, might I say -- très intéressant! Et toi? Un centime for your thoughts!

My friend, I must close here -- I have une autre to write.

Songe profondément, cher frère,

Julie Moore

got arrested last night
a cop just slid out of the shadows
and took me away for
dreaming
heartcuffs and all
(musta thought I was the dangerous type)

down at the station
they locked me up
with idealists
and starwishers
and the truest of lovers
and when I refused
to hand over my hope
they threw me into solitaire
(which turned out to be a small cell
filled to the ceiling with
right angles and quadratic equations)
and forced me
to learn
geometry

Teresa Bossert

Awake Late Summer Night

Open windows
breathing silent
dreams that
came and went
I noticed
curtains float
on midnight winds
and thoughts remote

Mike Pinkowski

Let's Set the Address Book on Fire

Although the boston coffee settled me,
and National Geographic came today,
and my horoscope revealed some subtlety,
and the dishes were dried and put away;

although a cricket was heard near my shoe--
which, Granny says, foretells good luck to come--
and I won at bingo--and a big pot, too--
and I found seven packs of Wrigley's gum;

although I made my bed at half-past six,
and cashed a check without a fuss,
read F. Scott Fitzgerald's books for kicks,
and doodled perfect doodles on the bus;

it was a phone call I was waiting for:
you left without words. I won't write any more.

Darwin Hughes

What Am I Doing Here?

The reoccurring question;
that we will never be able to answer.

What am I doing here? Waiting for
the RTA bus, you insipid newt.
What are you doing here?

Karen K. Johnston

From Children's Hands

She stepped outside and noticed there were small
Clean piles from children's hands: the carcassed bugs,
The twigs, the leaves were grouped in concrete blocks
That should belong at neighbors' homes but now
Were set beside the stoop. They cleaned the shelves
Once lined with spider webs and old debris
That washes in with rain and summer's hot
Dry breeze.

She never knew the kids till now.
They rang the bell and ran, or sat on curbs
Disturbing dogs, or woke her up like all
Those crying cats that seem to live outside
The window of her room. But when she saw
The tidy stacks she changed her face. Her eyes
Tried finding children but the streets were blank.

I Need a Diuretic

My arteries can do no more
To cool the heat I store
These days

my veins burst
The walls cannot sustain
Accumulated pain

there's too much
Blood

I'm swollen from
Your salty words
So I elevate my feet

Andrew Bendelow

An un-answered proposal

Why don't we just take things easy, as they are?
Why these
urgent undercurrents in our flowing words?
this explosive caring? this emotional extortion?
I don't think this
too loving.

But ah, love.
here--a vulnerable confession:
tonight I am especially
sedentary, would fall,
all the way down
your body, would melt
into bed
and pert pools of warm flesh . . . heu-eu . . .
(saying it don't make it).

Why don't you let
this mutual exercise in earnest inertia?

In good faith,
join my declining dance--only (don't worry)
until dawn
when we'll get up, (yes)
kill again.
But come,
now, and we can pale luxuriant
into perfect light. Just
believe this moment,
release your self:
we shall flood all over
this crazy, fucking world.
Else,
I drown alone,
and that's old.

Paul Garrison

The Mare and the Stallion

Under the moon's
lascivious reflection
sway the two
genders
as a crimson
flame
burns luminously
in the night.
Fever chimes 7 times,
shaking
their very existence
and the
solo
of a turtle-dove
is sung in rich,
sweet tones. Bright
aurora deeply pierces
souls
suspended in the
night's blue
sky

Helen L. Walker

Crying's not that bad --

the welling up, the filling full,
overflowing into
feelings or
sorrow
or pain but pure
or big somehow.

Crying's not little,
not petty --
not when I cry for you.

Terri Stone

reflections upon moving

I

There
is a mote of dust in the air
and it glitters like
pyrite shavings
eventually it settles
as dust should
lazes about
on the newly oiled hardwood
of the floor

II

We sit
crosslegged on the hardwood
smell of cerulean blue
(we painted the woodwork
cerulean blue)
definitive in our noses
- a biting smell

III

look, you say,
the cat has been on the windowsill
I wonder how you can tell
you point out the fine strokes of fur
black on the blue
Aah, I say, and laugh.
You move languidly
stretching and flexing like
the cat
the cat
who has sauntered in from somewhere
stretches with you and paces ahead into the kitchen

IV

There is a poster over the sink
Gauguin's "Woman with Mango"
By the breakfast table, a window that rises
to the ceiling
we spent an entire afternoon polishing it;
its flashings the communication of some mysterious message

V

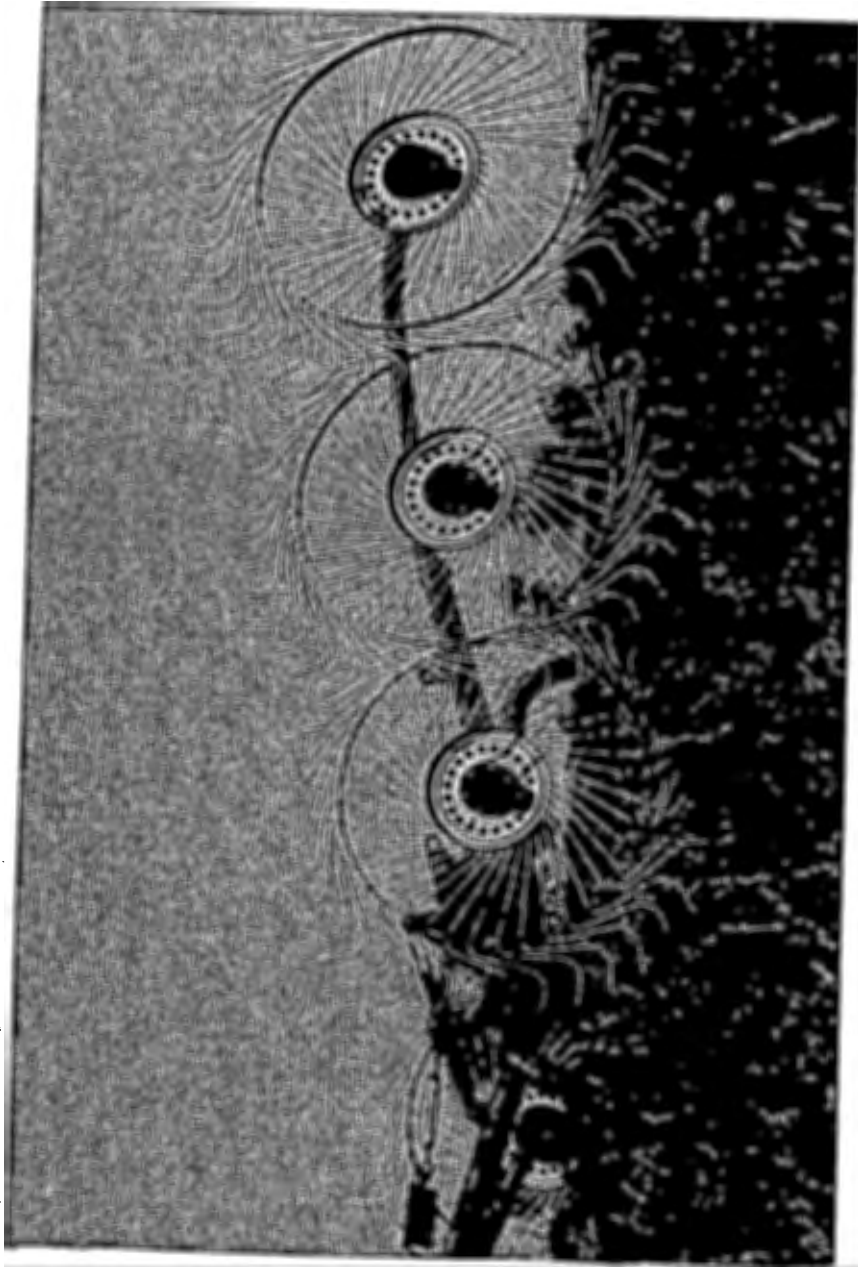
wind rushes in
bringing the ghosts of
our neighbors their Beatles
and their cabbage soup
deserts the kitchen for the long
air tunnel of the hallway
finds the beaded curtain of our bedroom door
and stops to play
We follow, beads swinging wildly
with our passing

VI

In the room we light a cone
of christening incense
Smoke rises to dance attendance
in remote angles of the ceiling
the walls are a riot of
white and yellow "Goin' to the Meeting House"
quilt squares
the fruits of long-ago women

VII

The bed
a refugee from other houses, other lovers
lies squat and comfortable
you smile up at me from it
pretty nice place, you say
The cat
(on the living room windowsill
again)
silently agrees



Anne Hubbard Norton

From Theresa, in the Bath-tub, Just as You Left Her

"Again, in spite of that, we call
this Friday good."
--T. S. Eliot, "East Coker"

Cap'n Egg-Wash, tenacious as bees, has plucked up every snow-drop and foxglove in the forest, some by the roots, and now, wagging them in his ham-fist from arm's length until their heads droop, hollers "my lady! My dear dear lady! First of the season! You must come see!" from the flagstones beneath what he thinks is my window.

Owl-eyed, importunate, thin-voiced, greasy-jowl'd, obsequious, bald-headed, scrofulus, toilet-water-drowned, mismatched-madras-clad, white-shoe'd, nail-biting, callipygous, slack-jawed--O! most odious Cousin Egg-Wash--snivelling, grovelling, simpering, grinding a toe into the granite until Sara the maid, risking a sacking, dumps a basinful out not-my-window onto his shimmering jaundiced pate.

Meanwhile my savior, my champion, my knight, squire, hero-lover--you gavotte in victory over Son-of-Egg-Wash on the croquet lawn, never thinking, (never thinking), never suspecting. Son-of-Egg-Wash throws his tantrum, breaks his mallet, rips up hoops, wickets, divots, casts them all toward your mocking face, kicks the balls toward your dancing feet. I hold my breath as Mrs. Farrell catches sight of the dripping Egg-Wash with his dripping bouquet on the flagstones, and calls out for the giggling maid.

I have read your letter--your note--your abrupt paragraph of subjectless sentences--five times or six, and doubtless were I to turn it face down now in the bath, among the bursting rainbow bubbles, and let the black ink float in smoke-like sworls, I would find that I have the words memorized. I could recite, declaim . . . but still I want to read them again, again in your classic schoolboy hand, and all these distractions are annoying. Scampering maidsteps in the hall; lumbering orthopaedic boots on the backstairs, and the masculine voice of Mrs. Farrell, half-sternly: "Sara, don't make me call you again!" Scent of peonies . . . whence that? Imagination maybe. Or perfume in the borrowed notepaper, released by the steam of the bath.

"My darling Tessa . . . my darling Tessa . . . my darling . . .," the letter repeats senselessly on its own like a Hail-Mary caught in a computer loop. It's of no use. I re-fold, re-place in the gold-lined envelope, drop it over the porcelain tub wall to the rug. Scrawled, smeared the one word leers up still. Theresa. It won't be silenced. I flick soapy water at it from long nails. A droplet rivers through; ink runs, pales. Still it speaks, if more softly: Theresa. I have to assume it is talking to me.

"Pa-a-a-a!" Son-of-Eggwash squeals, pig-like, in the garden. The splintered orange wicket is tucked under his arm like a swagger stick. Son-of-Egg-Wash knows this part of the script very well. He will accuse you of cheating, of unfair play, then of hatred. Egg-wash will laugh gently, pat the thinning, oily hair of his vile offspring. Vile offspring will resent the laugh, will accuse you of meanness, maliciousness, animosity, cruelty, insensitivity, intemperance, inconstancy, intolerance, foul language, and at long last the anticipated: bigotry! O the odious manufacturer of that odious joy will eye you then through his bleak owl eyes and "upper class son of a bitch" he'll be thinking as he comforts little Egg-Wash-Junior with uncertain murmurings of "I'm sure Cousin Frank meant you no offense, Bradley. You meant my son no offense, did you, Frank?" A squeaky soupçon of contempt will creep along the edge of that well-lubricated effeminate voice.

Cousin Frank, too, will laugh dismissively--your only line, true, but it is worth the critics' annual trophy. The corpulent, fatulent Reprise-of-Egg-Wash will howl all the louder and wave his bayonet-pointed wicket in a menacing way toward his Cousin Frank's throat. The boy thinks, "when I'm eighteen I'm gonna buy a gun, and I'm gonna shoot Frank Aston dead, just see if I don't."

Poor, pathetic, hopeless, sorry, futile little Son-of; I have prompter plans for Frank Aston. The black ink of presumptuous Theresa streams to the envelope's tattered edge and gathers in a puddle of grey smoke. And Egg-Wash offers mangled, soggy foxgloves to his fractious carmine son. My foxgloves, I think, watching the muddy stems pass from the big yellow meaty fist to the small yellow meaty fist. First of the season. Egg-Wash glares at the smirk on your face.

"A word, Frank, if you have a moment," he speaks in noisy intimacy. You still call him Egg-Wash from time to time, to his face, without real malice, but he judiciously has abandoned your more flattering school-name. There's deference, if you will. There's a mere big-city businessman who, family or no family, knows his place. He rises, beckons; you and he move off into the shadow of the gazebo while Son-of grinds the flowers to pulp beneath his little mortar. During the last eight years, Egg-Wash has wearied of chastising you for your treatment of his son; today it is a more pressing matter: today he is concerned for me, for my fragile emotions. "That sweet, unsuspecting girl . . . how can you so callously betray . . . and with Pamela Herron, of all people, that gold-digging trollop . . . really too awful for poor, sweet, dear little Theresa . . . deserves better treatment." Deserves battered foxgloves.

There is, outside the bathroom door, a muted ineffectual slap of human handskin on human faceskin as Mrs. Farrell catches up to Sara in the cul-de-sac. I run more hot water to muffle the domestic fracas. I close my eyes and dread the offer of Cap'n Egg-Wash's fat plaid arm

at dinner, dread the bit of vegetable that will remain in his brown teeth all evening as he regales the party with tales of war atrocities, naval pranks, tax loopholes, insurance fraud, and yet another maudlin version of the courtship of that luckless lady who, even from the grave, must necessarily share the guilt of the begetting of Egg-Wash-Fils.

Aunt Fanny has not handed down her guest-list, but I know whom to expect at the dinner table: herself, her nameless gentleman-friend, you, your first cousin Rosa, your second cousin Steven, Steven's third wife Megan, Megan's grown daughter Amelia, your distant cousin Egg-Wash, your distanter cousin Son-of-Egg-Wash, and those three sullenly omnipresent French college students with the tomato-top haircuts and the steel-rimmed spectacles who look for all the world as if they would condescendingly quote an entire encyclopaedia to one if one accidentally pushed the proper button. And fifteen to twenty hovering servants. And me. Me, I will have to be mannerly to the mannerless Frenchmen, to the assorted cousins, even to Son-of himself while he belches, scratches, picks his nose, and eats sugar by the silver-spoonful out of the sugar bowl.

But most of all I must be mannerly to Aunt Fan's favorite Egg-Wash--O! most ardent and malodorous Cap'n Egg-Wash--the eponymous shiny yellow dough of whose face will be slightly swollen below the right eye where you, reluctantly, have had to smack him soundly for referring to Pamela Herron, of all people, as a gold-digging trollop. All that, of course, will be largely forgotten at dinner. At dinner, the copiously fleshed get of Cap'n Egg-Wash will peer with suspicion beneath the lid of a Blue Willow casserole and, "what's this junk?" he will bellow into its depths as if it were the ear-trumpet of some hard-of-hearing stranger whom he wished to render totally deaf.

Aunt Fan will beam and pat the hand of her gentleman-friend. Neither of them has ever had children and they love these long-planned holiday gatherings round the surrogate-matriarchal table. Premise number one for Aunt Fan is the popular notion that "children are charming." Premise two is "Son-of-Egg-Wash is a child." The conclusion, then, is self-evident, so that she will beam and pat the hand of her gentleman-friend and say, "That, young Bradley, is shrimp creole--an old family recipe."

Young Bradley will survey the creole, pronounce that "it looks like the first guy didn't chew it good enough," snort himself nearly into self-strangulation with his own humor, and take ten helpings. Aunt Fan will beam, acknowledging the apposition of the joke. The miniature Egg-Wash will take one bite, but will not swallow, before adding with awe-inspiring irrelevancy, "a kid at school told me how they kill chickens. Wanna know what he says?"

Egg-Wash, thrilled at this rosy dawn of scientific enquiry in his child, will take the challenge enthusiastically, urging that the bloated boy divest himself fully of the expertise of his learned school chum.

You will give me a look of amusement, a wink of sympathy, and will mouth the words "we'll talk later." And I'll nod while the child with fevered relish simultaneously masticates his creole and massacres his mythological cockerels.

Amelia will go a bit green, the Frenchmen will engage in their own quietly rude conversation, and I'll let my mind wander out to the baroque fountain in the croquet lawn, to its bottom pool, its deepest pool, to its deep copper-colored water

And when I return, the cocks will have been untidily beheaded and you will be verbally assaulting the distant boy-cousin once again--calling him "Clone-of-Egg-Wash"--that being a new one of which you are particularly proud--to his slick little magenta face--and Egg-Wash will be seething and sweating and snarling and Son-of will enumerate again those favored pejoratives until the final inevitable gob of the filth of his wrath will spew forth and "bigot!" will lie upon the lace tablecloth like a steaming black clot of coughed-up blood, and Aunt Fan will gasp.

And the French students will, after a moment's confusion, guess the awful, hideous family truth: that Son-of-Egg-Wash hasn't an idea in hell what the word "bigot" means, thinks it disparages Cousin Frank's ancestry and sex life and bathroom habits and moral-ethical-religious system all at one fell swoop. And they will try to deduce among themselves just what word it is that he really means. And of course they will titter in their Gallic way, but it really won't be funny because knives will be in Young Egg-Wash's raptor-eyes and he will sputter, "someday you'll be dead, Frank Aston; murdered icky bloody gory mutilated dead, and I'll be glad." Aunt Fan will gasp again, and go lily-pale, and clutch the hand of her gentleman-friend. Even Egg-Wash will realize that the child must be excused from the table, but he, too, will leave you with a chilling glare.

Over the Sambuca, then, one of the students will tell a more or less amusing tale of having been an extra in an Italian film a year or so back. Spirits will improve. Amelia will retrieve her color. Fan will, for a time, forget her shock. Before I let my restless mind return to the fountain, I will require it to pause out on the garden walk and to consider the lethal orange fragment of croquet wicket that earlier had served little Egg-Wash-Redux as swagger-stick and bayonet. I will remind myself that I must think as a child, must move as a child, must finally act as a child, so that by the time the family gets to the fountain to find the suggestion of you in the smoke-like swirls of russet in the water of the bottom pool, all eyes will turn as one, horrified but accepting

I am interrupted by a second scent of peonies, a sense of sunset casting green shadows of gazebo pillars over the flagstones and the flattened corpses of foxgloves and snow-drops. The water has gone quite cold now, and the bubbles all have burst. At the end of the uncarpeted hall, crumpled into a starched-linen fetus, Sara continues to shed her vulgar tears.

Steven Dolgin

a photograph

got this photograph
keep it wherever i live

at spring street
i was alone

there were rats
in mrs. strang's house

saw young girls
going to the knit and rip stores

squirrels lived in the tree
they looked for food on spruce street

it rained in springfield that winter
then wind and the city was intricate crystal

like beautiful pianos and ships
in the gallery in piper's alley

i ate donuts with coke and vodka
and was not privileged

except for one smile
that i won't give back

Brian Daldorph

geminif's

Le Diable boiteux

while phosphor's busy looking for
fresh partners to improve
(since hesper, kind instructor, taught her
all the basic moves)

he's polishing performances
he'll later improvise
(her pretty little dances are
as lovely as his lies!)

an actor of such beauty, he
struts his to's and fro's
until (where there is company)
he goes, he gigolo's

but through all paints and greases they are
in each other's clutch
oh, heavenkind together!
coupled crutch to crutch

Scott Homler

Mesmerized

Atlas
take me in -
Show me Bangkok,
let me savor Montana,
And bound across the Pyrenees.

But please take me, and
hide me,
Keep me in your folds.

Show me a million acres,
A hundred choices for
A resting place.
Guide my
hand
Into the country
Where every heart is deep as a forest.

Take me there,
As my fingers fondle
each promising picture.

Brenda Stalcup

Flight

Falling fast, a flash of red
hawk wings whirling and whistling
through thin air quick as thought.

We saw him proud war hawk
lord of desert, lonesome sunburnt land;
Sky-soarer in swift downward flight.

Plummeting in bright ball of brilliant fire,
behind the dark hills he dropped from our sight,
ruler of far reaches. He did not rise again.

Terri Stone

deep waters

... and he dove into a pool of darkness
 that splashed when he entered
 and stained his red suit
he swam a long time
 blind
 because it was dark, you know
 arms getting tired
 they seemed somewhat smaller too
he wondered if size was relevant
 and what it was relevant to
 glanced down at his Lycra Speedo
 swim suit
 and was reassured for a moment
 by the shiny Spandex
 by its comforting constriction
 but the next time he looked
 the suit was gone
he cried
 now his eyes were tired
 and he thought
I really just want to sit down
 so he did
I would like a cup of coffee, too
 as he sat drinking, he decided that
 the blackness was really somewhat
 restful.

Karen K. Johnston

Icicles Drip Down

He is the winter you shudder against; still you live
in iceland. You stayed, afraid to move, practical--
what would you do with expensive wools, electric
blankets and shoveling shoes?

 You see your breath
in his cold air: condensations (to him), fascinating
moisture (to you). It becomes frost: crystal prisms
(to you), reflection of winter (to him).

 Layers
of frozen water build, expand with winter. He loves
his icicles; hangs them outside your bedroom, tempts
you with their beauty. But they're always cold, will
always be too cold. You try one again, but, brought
inside it melts in your hands left blue, your body
chilled through.

 If he gets cold enough, ice forms
on the inside. Your windows wear his thin sheets
that prevent you from seeing out. Your efforts to heat
your room, yourself, are futile. He penetrates
your bundled body. He ices your home, seeps through
the mailbox slit, plummets down your chimney, obliterates
your drive with snows too dense to plow. Winds sting
your cheeks; eyes tear, rolling down and forming
puddled ears; fingers bleed. You believe it goes
with the territory.

Sandra Tompson

The Bedroom

Mornings, we watch leaves
Color and fall,
Count seasons on bead-leaved abacus.
Two stories up-
on my mind--
Rise to leaves,
Lie to seasons.
Wait for your reply.
We'll come again.
Nights, we watch headlights
Chase bare limbs
Across the wall.

Masquerade

I have tried to dress you
in scarves and gypsy rings,
I've posed you in the attic
propped with mystic things.

The photographs are undeveloped,
for the negatives exposed
that the trappings didn't fit you--
You squirmed in borrowed clothes.

Until I know you better,
I'll take back the mystic things,
And meanwhile turn to focus
on these scarves and golden rings.

Terri Stone

"to Samuel Beckett"

Vision 1

Straddling the institutional chair
you narrow your eyes
and whisper of the
wonders
you could show me
your snake-like hands
slither down your thighs
and up again to your engraved
belt buckle.
You stand up
the chair is gone
but behind us I can feel
black silk sheets.
You are biting your lip -
which is bleeding.
Your eyes are yellow.

Vision 2

I am in a subway
the car is empty yet
dozens are just about
to enter
but never do.
I turn and see
a huge rat
with no tail.

Vision 3

The rain is still falling
puddles in the yard are
spreading and joining.
I am marooned,
I think.
The house echoes around me
my husband's hand falls
heavy on my shoulder
"Turn around"
he says.

Nettie Strohkirch

Desire

Desire is a red-gold prancing stallion
Gallop in the sun. His brilliance burns;
He stirs my heart to flame. Brute champion,

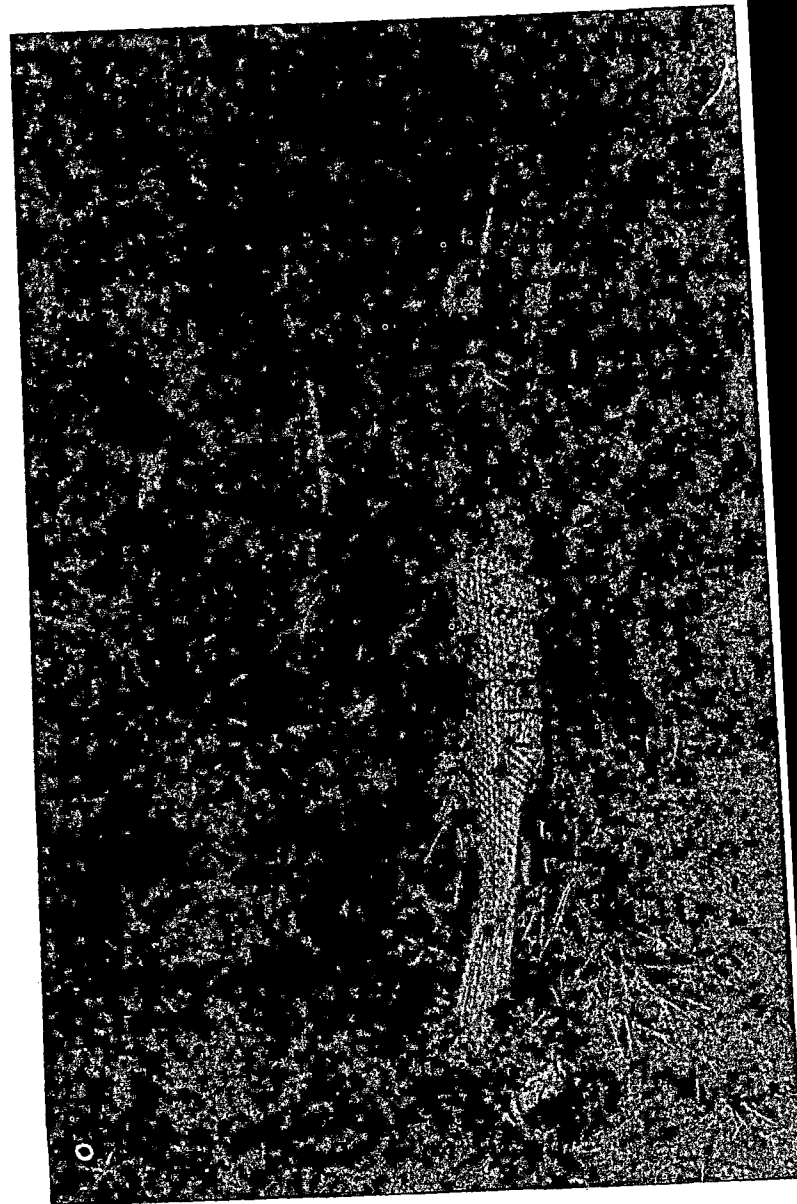
He foaled in fire. I ride his blazing pillion;
My pride, my heart's last shield, melts from the burn.
Desire is a red-gold prancing stallion,

A Pegasus without Bellerophon
To force his rein. He comes! His hot hooves churn;
He stirs my heart to flame. Brute, champion,

He bugles, "Victory." Bold. Clarion.
He surges on, my soul to win, to spurn.
Desire is a red-gold prancing stallion

Trampling my reserves. What equestrian
Could curb his charge? The red rascalion turns;
He stirs my heart to flame. Brute champion,

He snorts the love-hot flame; his heated loins
Wilt my defenses down. His fierce eyes burn.
Desire is a red-gold prancing stallion;
He stirs my heart to flame. Brute. Champion!



Cynthia Capodice

a hunk out of the middle of

Fishing Blues

Down here in this little cracker town they still carried cosanyl, his favorite, his elixir of life. He knew all the brands, the formulas and how they varied in color, taste, and viscosity. And he knew how much, exactly how much, bitter codeine went into each. But cosanyl! It was a natural. Not like Novahistimine DH or MH, respectively grape and orange, both synthetic stomach twisters brought to you by the folks at Dow who made oven cleaner and napalm. Or Terpin Hydrate, clear and flowing like Karo syrup with a taste that made him shudder. And he had to boil off the chloroform in that one, concentrating the codeine in the bottom of the pan--that was last ditch.

But cosanyl . . . a favorite ingredient in the recipe for getting high--it had slippery elm and black cherry bark and wild lettuce. Wild lettuce! He had often hoped to find a patch of that on his hunts through the forest, a green growing patch, lush in some bog or dark woodsy spot and he would pull it gently by the roots and chew the bitter narcotic leaves and sit there, among the toadstools and rotting trunks with their thrust white shelves of fungus. Slowly his metabolism would wind down and down until the pounding would stop, the pounding he always felt in his wrists and neck and head and he'd sit there until he was way slowed down and not thinking about anything, until he could watch with infinite pleasure and patience, the slow progress of a fluorescent green beetle down the bark of a fallen maple. He imagined that Thoreau had watched ants in that fashion, felt the ants struggle over leaves and sticks with a dead cricket. And he used to feel that absorption, that Thoreau patience, all the time, especially when he was a boy. He was ten or so, he remembered, when he fished all the forest preserve ponds, long afternoons where he seemed to hear every whisper of movement and see every flash of wings and sense the variation of light and dark on the leaves and grass as clouds overhead floated across the sun.

Now it was difficult.

He returned with the corn and the tape Dulcie had asked for and helped her take the shucks off. Dulcie stripped off the strings of corn silk he had missed as she plunged the ears in boiling water. She also helped Walter's sister, Sis, eighty and decrepit, who was

poking at hush puppies in the skillit, her trembly old hands working with memory but without competence. Sis always turned her hearing aid down when Larry was in the room (although for the past five years she had needed a new one and barely heard Dulcie's voice over the buzz she noticed when she turned it up). Never particularly close, Dulcie and Sis had quarreled over Walter's personal effects after his death, most notably his Masonic Lodge ring and the family onyx ring with diamond chip. During the heat of discussion, Sis pulled a hand through her hair and swept her hearing aid onto the floor where it lay for a minute before Flossie walked across it with her right trotter.

Dulcie served Sis and Larry and the three of them ate silently. Dulcie did not like the idle time at meals. Hands were full of forks and knives and useless for any sort of mending or sorting. She usually read when she ate, Family Circle or Better Homes and Gardens, but with Larry there she felt it was pointedly rude.

"I love this place you know, Aunt Dulcie," Larry said. "I think I could live here."

"Oh, you'd git tard of at' in winter," she said, like she always did when Larry began these conversations.

"No, no, I really love the quiet and location. So soothing. Maybe I could teach school. I could teach math I think."

Sis dropped her fork with a clatter and Dulcie reached to the floor and quietly picked it up. She glanced at Larry who was waiting for her to say something as he sat there, flecks of corn caught in his beard. She watched his eyes as they drifted behind his glasses, the round clear glasses he wore at night.

"Wall, y'might not want t'be so far from everthing like y'ar down here," she said. "It'd be a sight more work than fishin', teachin' school." She looked down at her hand which was wrapped around Sis's fork, the big brown thumb cracked and callused, the wedding band on her fourth finger worn down to a dull gleam. She handed Sis the fork and rose from the table, automatically picking up a load of plates and cups. Larry emptied the skillit grease in the can by the back door and went to his room to get ready for night fishing.

He never went to the pier until the sun was down. Sunset watchers were there now and he hated sitting on his camp stool while elderly strollers lolled about the pier and talked about the color of the sky and what he was catching, eager to comment on why they were there. He had heard from long hours put in on the pier, too many stories about retirement and gas mileage and surgery. By the time the color faded from the sky, they were gone and then he arrived, stepping out of the gray shadows with his night rig. He carried a heavy salt-

water pole and a spin cast reel as well as his lighter pole with a spinning reel and his tackle box with a universe of night needs. He stopped at the rental shack and bought a Dr. Pepper, a moon pie, and a dozen bloodworms. The shack sold food and bait and smelled like dead shrimp and cheeseburgers and rubber boots--a smell he loved, the smell of the South and the smell of all the times he had been high on the pier with Dr. Pepper and Orange Crush or a bottle of Wild Irish Rose. He liked to fish about halfway down the pier. It was deep enough there for a variety of things to catch, but not so far out that he'd have to put up with the local gentry who sometimes knotted around the end with buckets of chicken blood and guts to draw in sharks. He had had his share of experience watching the shark catchers, watching them hoist the fish, flopping on the deck, club them and then put cigarettes out in their eyes before cutting them up or just kicking them back into the ocean.

He baited his lines and cast out, then opened his campstool, and his bottle of cosanyl and a Dr. Pepper, alternating sips of the bitter codeine with cold pop. In about ten minutes he was beginning to feel the slowness creep over him, the welcome slowing down that was part of getting into the whole night thing, and he felt the slow tug of his line with satisfaction and let the filament ease out a few feet, wondering if he had a crab, letting it go on out a little further until he struck and set the hook. From the way it pulled, he knew it wasn't a crab but something slow pulling and steady, not a game fish, he guessed, but something off the bottom. As he pulled it to the surface and saw its belly flash, he knew he was right, it was an ocean catfish, just a couple of pounds and gray and soft sided with beady eyes and nasty stingers whipping around the pluglike head. He held it just right behind the gills and yanked out the hook with a pair of pliers and kicked it back into the water.

He baited his line again, using the head half of a whole bloodworm. If he used up the head halves first tonight, then he could look forward to using the bottom halves when he felt mellow and didn't want to worry about their raspy bites on his thumbs. It was his ritual and he planned to be done pulling the bloodworms in half by around 11 o'clock. He finished the syrup and the Dr. Pepper finally, making the sips of each come out about even and then sat back for serious fishing. About 10:30 the shack radio switched from country music to Uncle Billy on the radio, coming in on the night air from far away on some dry hill in Tennessee. Uncle Billy, reaching out across the darkness, was feeling out souls in trouble, souls with dollars to spare for Uncle Billy to pull God a little closer. Uncle Billy had long arms for God, but he needed money to reach him. He asked for it too, not in some trembly whining voice, not like some groveling beggar--he just asked, in bold certain tones that rang with conviction as he said he wanted what God wanted, dearhearts, and God didn't want no clinking-clanking silver that Judas accepted for betraying Christ; "God wants folding money!" he yelled. "Tha's right, dearhearts! The stuff that folds is what God wants! God

doesn't care if that bill is sweaty and stuffed down in the pocket of your worn out jeans and he doesn't care if it's rolled up in a corner of your purse--a soul is a soul where God is concerned and he needs your support dearhearts! He depends on your help! YES, he will save you, YES he will save you all who so believe in him and in believing him support his works!"

Larry raised his empty bottle in a silent toast to Uncle Billy back across the dark swampy night to his Tennessee hills where dollar were already being sent, folded into note paper or maybe going out as checks and money orders or stock even or real estate titles or bonds. It was just all right, all of it, Larry thought, because just the week before he had heard Uncle Billy tell about some hard pressed but devoted follower who had brought him a cow, "Walked it in dearhearts, walked it in fact from a holler in some nearby county, to Uncle Billy's Hall of Faith and handed the rope to Uncle Billy. And I looked that man in the eye," Uncle Billy whispered, "And I said, God loves you--God will bless this act of faith. And do you know friends in Christ--God will work his way and his will with that man! His land will prosper and be green and his foundation of trust in the Lord will earn him a whole herd of cows built from faith."

Larry heard Uncle Billy tell a story like that every time he was on, sometimes it was a cow and sometimes it was a car, but some dearheart always brought him something. Larry would like to take him a pig. Not some purebred, docile Poland China sow like Flossie, but one of the scrub pigs from down here in west Florida, the lean and bristly scrub pigs, spiny backed and wild with gray faces and callused muzzles from rooting their yellow tusks down in the gritty soil. He would love to see a scrub pig up there with Uncle Billy's livestock, gobbling up the baby chickens and snuffling back into the brush to breed a whole herd of scrub pigs, all mean and sour faced, bursting into the Hall of Faith with a clatter of hooves . . .

But someone was coming . . . He felt the slow footsteps through the boards. They stopped. Someone looked down into his bucket and then walked on without a word. People appeared and reappeared out of the dark like that on the pier. He liked it, the anonymous coming and going, the privacy of night fishing. It was later when he caught a stargazer, a funny swollen little thing all yellow with brown blotches and huge brown eyes. He almost put it in the bucket to admire but didn't. Its wide mouth looked grim and he hadn't handled one before and didn't know if it could bite. He admired it for a while, then snipped the line and kicked it over the edge of the pier.

About midnight he saw the restaurants in town starting to shut off their lights and it was about then he had a good strike and brought in a big sea trout, about five pounds, and had a good tussle bringing it up. It was a long silvery thing and he kept it for Dulcie to bake. An hour later someone caught a redfish, a really big redfish and they had to lower the big basket net to get it up and it weighed 26 pounds on the pier scale. That was unusual, that

was a really big fish. They all settled back down again, except that most of them decided one really big redbfish at one in the morning was all they were going to see, so they packed up and left. He listened to the soft clacking of tackle boxes going shut and the radio switched off then and the bait shack closed down and finally he was truly alone with nothing but the water sucking at the pilings. Softly opening his tackle box he reached down for the box of number four hooks and shook out of couple of Demerol tablets which he put far back on his tongue. His mouth filled with the bitter taste and he shuddered trying to keep from gagging as he repeated an old college song he used to sing when he was drunk. He couldn't remember it all, but it started out with, "One brown beer, a couple of ducks, three red hens, four free frogs, five fat females, six sick sailors, sodomists all, and seven scintillating syphilitic satyrs with eight evacuating est egoists (he liked that one), nine numb nymphomaniacs nibbling narwhales, ten tire irons tied to transvestite trick riders.

"I'm not the one," he said, rocking on the camp stool. "I'm not the one, the first born son, but the cousin once removed, sarcophagus one," and he reached down for the bottle again but he had drunk it all, so he tossed it far out into the ocean and just sat there letting the bitterness of the dissolving tablets soak through his soul. It was then that he realized as he always did during lucid flashes on the pier, that he was just one more human, just one more like these standups, these vertical breathers, hanging inert in the universe. They were all just the same and he was just the same and it was boring and didn't take enough energy, so he always had energy left, energy to do whatever he pleased out in the mainstream. But he didn't use, didn't use it, because he couldn't--he hated the mainstream and there was enough energy to be a theosophist or a Rastafarian or something, any damn thing that could use him up. Then his head pounded a little again and he felt the force of the blood in his body and there was still energy left over, not much, but enough; and that, dear friends, was what was hard; getting rid of that, dear friends, was not something he could do like snapping a sinker on a swivel hook.

Don Taylor

i found
pieces of words
on the ground

they belonged to no one
so they belonged to me

scattered by the wind
whatever they were
they are no more

Graham K. Rogers

Jacksonville

My European eyes
could hardly believe Jacksonville
once we'd crossed the five tracks
and passed the smoking stacks
behind the houses in multi-faded
wooden slats. We parked in still
streets, outside a busy liquor store,
opposite they sold shiny motorcycles,
but we knew who did more
business there, with your brother Michael's
taste in beer and the stories we traded
for cheap vodka;
and all those lies.

M. H. Withrow

Patriarchy

Patriarchy
drowning us with the
past.
Blacks you whip
girls you strip,
the chain grows
link by link.

Guilt plays
homeless child,
ever hungry
it pounds our door-
finds no place to rest its bones
winds up on my floor.

Feeding on pride
and misconceptions
with arrogance
for dessert.
It makes me gaze
through pus filled eyes
which burn and run and
hurt.

Domineering
rule of rock
on flower is decaying.
Make your death machines
but quick-
while few of us are praying.

See the walls
behold they crumble
hope it won't take long
for Matriarchy
to play Phoenix
and rebuild
all that's
gone.

Paul Garrison

Warmth Within

All
esteem
remaining within
its boundaries; going
with the bends of
the river's path
and splashing
'gainst the sides
of the heart.
Though
silent,
the simplest of
regards cannot escape,
even through the soul's
hollow skeleton.
And yet we weep
upon
tender memories
and ache for
forgotten feelings
that
once
held us fast
to identity.
But
we must search
again and again
until
the spry scent
of that same fellowship,
though in new form,
returns
to our nostrils
and
fills our void,
loosening the
noose of desolation.
For
a True Friend
is
never lost, but
only
misplaced.

Teresa Bossert

Empirical Education and Me

Sometime during the illusion
I had feelings of "completeness"
Blue and green sounds I found
and knew that that was all.

Behind the Smile

Still avoiding introspections
Mindless of the clouds' directions
Spaces void in long-term dreams
Doubting what Freud said it means

As We Pass Through Time

I have un-known
my own beliefs
and far outgrown
your innocence
So sad to say
That children fade
when just today
I saw him smile

Tanya Hancoos

The winged creatures,
that rule the sky,

Dominate
the tops of
the leafless trees.

The tree tops, not
the bottom branches,
are filled,

For,
who wants to be the
lowest
in a hierarchy?

Christine M. Maier

Imposture

Sparkling
jauntily, the
faceted carapace
deceives - look. The creature within
is dead.

Don Taylor

you are a widow of the war
and of the evening

i have seen you
gather up the children
who survived the passing
of the pain
to tell you tales of slaughter
and encounters
with the victims of your vision
who have lost their sons and daughters
to the screams of wounded women
that the soldiers don't remember

the only weapons
ever used by you
were words

you have lost
the war
you are a widow
of the evening

Scott Nowlan

The Worker

The worker lies exhausted
Spread eagle on the
Front room carpet with
Window putty eyes;
New and improved
Hand scraper blues
Lean on the side door.
No way out,
Except through the
Window of the rented T.V.
Too many fantasies lived out
In the darkness.
The worker stirs before
Adjusting the volume control;
Thinking about the workday
And the rest of Life.
The rocking chair invites;
There the worker sinks
Further into exhaustion.
Later woken,
Spread eagle on the carpet,
By the early morning
T.V. tube fizz.
He hesitates.

Mike Pinkowski

Subconsciously, You Hated Me
(Are We Ready to Fall?)

I found the letters you wrote me
next to my crayons and white school glue.
The glue in the bottle was dry. The reply I had begun
I don't remember writing. Furthermore,
My handwriting has changed.

Am I bitter? It's hard to be. Some days I
repeat myself, trying to work up the enthusiasm
for a distribute. It never works. Imagine me saying:
"Your juxtaposition of the primary colors was never
as fully realized as mine."

Lacking that approach, I've chosen to see the cold wit--
the lurking underpinnings of purple and orange--in your last letter.
And I've forgotten how to tie my shoelaces
When they came undone.

Don Taylor

i sit
next to
a perfumed woman
who cares less
about me
than she cares
about the ice
melting
in her drink

Anne Hubbard Norton

Again

"That is not what I meant at all
--Eliot, "Prufrock"

If this pale Woman-corpse float by again
beflowered on a barge like spurned Elaine
bestowing from its frost-touched lips a prayer-
a hopeful silver sliver of despair--

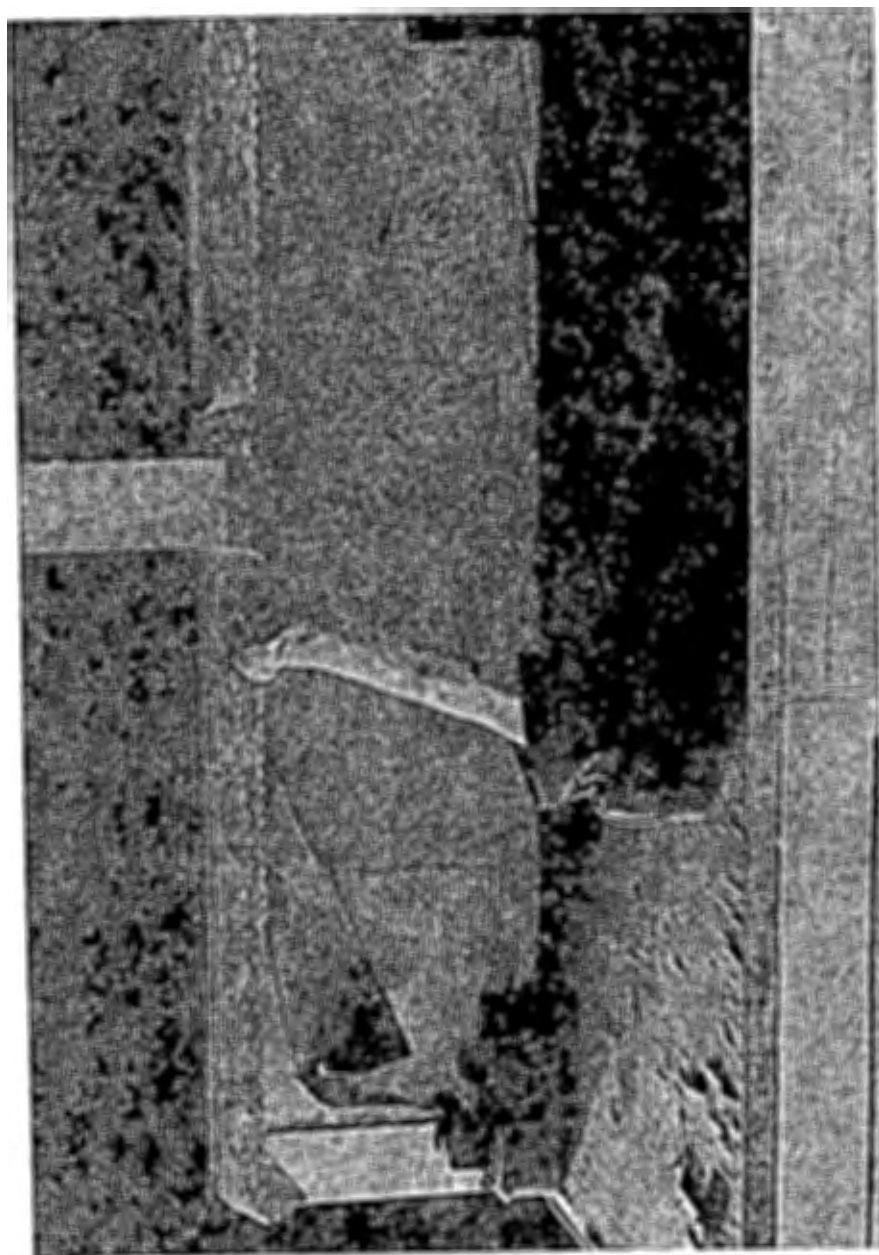
would that ensanguined Man bestow a word,
some mystic absolution rarely heard
in latter days? And would he thus restore
the life's-blood to his favorite Clark Street w

Or would the process merely start anew,
the exegetic tasks left to a few
veiled Priestesses who, virginal and vain,
retrieve, transfuse, and cast her off again?

Helen L. Walker

sometime

sometime you have no dam choice.
somethin' cum over yer heart
and it done. that it.



.Jeffery Duncan

Apple Eye

She has been dead for thirteen years. Given the chance, she might have died gracefully. She might have, really, you know.

Vespid - the old man:

Certainly I am not the only one in this most foul of conditions. Perhaps it is a universal dilemma. Perhaps senility does not exist - at least not in the conventional way we, or at least not as I, have always assumed it has existed and would exist for me. Indeed. Another practical joke from God. What do I mean "perhaps"? I know it does not exist.

There goes the first group to breakfast. Hines, Proben, Groben, Grott, Amhertz, Pezell. Drip, drip, dripping their salivatory fluid as they look at one another, talking with such great fluidity (literally) about nothing of relevance - unless, of course, you know the code, the pattern. And that's not easily decipherable. I try to record my own pattern(s), but the pen shakes and twists on the page, and I appear mad with age. Ah, and here comes the patronizing bitch now. But I am too cruel, too harsh, too insensitive. But am I not expected to be? Is it not my privilege?

"Oh, Vespid! Why will you not ring when you need to go. Now your sheets are ruined."

Damn.

Mirow - the worm:

I like it in here. The smell. The taste. And . . . I'm not above admitting it . . . the adventure. Vespid knows I'm here watching. Yes, he knows I'm here. In the room, that is - not exactly where I'm at, for I move around all the time. Always pulling myself up. But he's seen me on the ceiling, floor, wheelchair wheel, (briefly) and, of course, here in my apple, all shiny with dust. The apple is the safest spot for me to do my watching - made in Iowa, it refuses to rot. The ceiling is most dangerous: my greyness does not blend in properly there, and believe me, the adrenal glands flow most heavy and true when I watch the shaky movements of the old man from upside down, sticking to the ceiling like syrup.

* * *

Growing up in Slantonton, Vespud had always paid particular attention to his aging. Not that he "matured" in any way serving to distinguish his yearly, daily, momently progression toward the "Big D" from anyone else's. He was simply fascinated by it, irritated by his lack of control over it. Drawn toward it, he knew, like winter to spring. But like most sensitive children, he was very much aware of the below-surface particulars around him. Always aware.

On the endless car rides, to and from various family reunions - contests initiated by his monolithic mother. Not from a lack of ability did he lose, for we already suspect him of possessing an intense awareness of such things; rather, it was a lack of concern which we may label the defeating factor here. His eyes would filter past the cows and dogs and sheep and goats, and instead he would ponder over the history, the genealogy of these animals. Each one he saw he knew had an ancestry - more than likely, more interesting than his own - and he grew saddened and distracted and lonely that he alone gave it any thought. But what was he to do? Keep his mouth shut.

* * *

From above, the Friendly Home for Progressively Peaceful Disjuncture looks like a pinwheel (motionless) with the grand breakfast/luncheon/supper hall centermost. Spoked away from this central chamber are the hallways of living quarters and their contents, both animate and fixed. One good thing - you must admit this - is that everyone gets a private room. Not that many of the residents notice, though. But of course they notice. But of course they see.

So you can imagine each "aged's" reaction to the no-door ordinance recently signed and enacted. Simply stated, brought on by the near fatal fall of Miss Corkerinitz, (poor dear. She fell and broke her hip in her room. No one noticed because she had fallen behind her closed door. Nurse Babbin, a singularly uninteresting character, thought the door locked for as she tried to open it Miss Corkerinitz's then unconscious body formed a highly effective wedge which did not allow the door to swing an inch. It was several hours before the broken hipped old gal woke up moaning, eventually screaming) this ordinance made it mandatory that every residential door - save that of the nursing and other medicotechnical staff - must be removed and curved mirrors installed so as to allow a total sweep of each room's inner happenings with but a single, thoughtless glance.

* * *

Mirow and Vespud's Simultaneous Dream:

Dim liquid things. Liquid lamps and desks. Watered down carpeting. Loosened bits of matter flowing through threaded carpet fibers, dripping onto liquid floors and down liquid steps. Lots of people with lots of liquid problems and pleasures. All this swirling and splashing and changing and reforming. Quite cool, then warm - nearly uncomfortably so.

* * *

Three doorless doorways from Vespud's room is Dr. BoDespot's chamber, identical to all the rest or very nearly so. Utilizing an unknown connection deep within the administrative bulk of the "Home," the doctor has sidestepped the no-wall-hanging ordinance enacted to preserve the blue sterility of the brick. Stuck neatly to his chamber walls with scotch two-way tape are numerous photos of people's insides. People we don't know. Dead people. The doctor enjoys magazine photos.

Dr. BoDespot is the only resident in the home who is not hopelessly senile. And again we err. Do you not remember that senility does not exist? Perhaps it is best that we understand, right off, that he is the only one not displaying the semblance of senility. But this distinction cannot go unpunished. Unfortunately, he is not near so clever as the others - clever here meaning a mixture of intelligence and experiential wisdom. Yes, he's confined to a wheelchair - but confined of his own diagnosis and desire and convenience. And gentle lethargy. Not a particularly grand doctor in terms of surgical expertise, Dr. BoDespot is, however, delightfully endowed with the ability to predict, beyond any doubt

"Well, it is truly unusual, and I might add pleasing, to see you sitting by the window this morning, Vespud," Dr. BoDespot says loudly, wheeling past Vespud and Mirow's room. Vespud, in his attempt to turn and reply, merely manages to form a small froth of spittle bubbles that lie like dish suds between slender, loose lips.

DAMN.

Vespud again:

Placebo effect. Ah, yes, you now see that I know more than you suspect. Little green pills coated with shiny plastic. Every morning and again at night they drop down my gullet. But they do me no good. In fact, they don't even dissolve in my gastric-void insides. I've seen them come out no worse for their brief stay in my intestinal rope.

Mirow the worm on envy:

Look at him. Sitting there in his great seat of movement. Pity

him? How can I pity a man who is a product of his own imagination. A man with intellect enough to combat his predicament if only he would try harder to resist. Shocking coming from a worm, I know, but accurate just the same. Be more specific, you demand. In time. I've always had the blessed ability to adjust, and that's what keeps me content in my lot, that and the realization that envying a man (Vespid) is unfounded when that man envies me as well. He does, you know . . . and you will too. Why would he envy a worm (Caterpillar - Goddus Vunderbarious)? For all the wrong reasons. He speaks.

"Nurse! Get bug spatter ceiling off matter."

Yes, very good, Vespid. You speak so flowingly. He's eyeing me now. I like you, Vespid. Pity you don't too. Yes.

* * *

Back when he was young, younger - twenty-seven to be exact - Vespid met his wife. Rather, he met the woman who was to be his wife, his life's partner. Somehow, he knew immediately upon seeing her that she alone would allow him to be himself. Oh, the relief and impatience at the moment of initial contact. Rautist, a fitting name for a woman with her qualities.

The day was dripping and spraying streams of wet on the grumbling pedestrians as he weaved through the populated sidewalks. All the while dodging the pointed metal barbs of umbrella buttresses. Already late for an appointment - a class, an engagement or some such thing - Vespid grinned. At that time he had not yet lost the ability to see humor in most trivialities. And as he listened to his toes squeak inside of his fully saturated suede shoes - new they were - he did grin.

"Sir," she had said. And that was all that was needed for him to know; although the gentle urgency of her hand on his arm, tugging, reinforced this awareness. So that in that brief moment before he turned to see what it was that this woman wished of him, he was aware that he would never leave her. In his mind he heard the words "at last" reverberate into darkness, and he sighed his relief noiselessly.

And so he helped a stranger that day (her problem is, of course, irrelevant). Vespid still believes that she had been shaped and designed with the sole purpose of aiding him in his journey toward mortality. "Shaped by what?" we ask. By that incalculable greater life force, no doubt. Right. In this assumption he was at least partially correct. More right than erroneous, in fact. She was there for a purpose.

But let us not become bogged in mystery. It was no supernatural force that commanded her presence before Vespid. And her purpose was not fantastic, but it was functional. For while Vespid could only hope it was so, and Rautist could only act within the limits of herself, her purpose in being there was to stimulate Vespid's mind. She was responsible for his earlier, youthful optimism and was the catalyst for much good in his life. Oh, but do not fool yourself by believing that she was but a hollow hull of skin, deemed fit only to help poor Vespid. He returned her gratuitous (and this is meant positively) behavior one-hundred fold. It was an arrangement of mutual satisfaction and was never so businesslike as it must sound here now. But this is not her tale, and we must, therefore, be content in knowing that it was a nearly ideal relationship. And the "nearly" does leave much room for conflict.

She was Vespid's age, or just three months shy, anyway. Her eyebrows were thin and wispy, nearly disappearing above green and blue eyes. Pupils always dilated. She chose to breathe through her nose, thus eliminating the need to part her lips, which were ordinary by sight but extraordinary in their softness. "Like kissing thickened air," Vespid had told her, intending flattery of sincere origin. She was taller than Vespid, but then most people were taller than Vespid, and it would not be mentioned here if the need for precision was not so critical. As it must be. Why? If you ask that then you have no business

Her picture, just now yellowing from exposure and sunned age, leans against his bedside lamp.

* * *

Vespid preparing for lunch - 11:45 a.m.:

I cannot help but think of her at times such as these. Rautist alone understood my paranoia. But paranoia implies a knowledge that is not based in fact, and I use the word now only out of desperation. If there is a more appropriate word then I have forgotten it. Like many things in my mind, here the correct word has slid or oozed or dripped out of my ear, onto my pillow as I rested one evening. The damn nurse, mistaking the word for a stain of spittle, has laundered the pillow casing, and now the word has dissolved in the laundry, lost to me forever. So rest assured that I am not paranoid, but it describes me just the same. About what am I paranoid? Why the worm, of course. Why must it watch and judge? If we are to communicate - and I think we are - then it must be of his instigation, for I am unable. Only then will I be more supportive of his presence. Always this drool.

"Vespid, you mustn't be angry. We must prepare for lunch now. Do not stiffen so. Honestly, more spittle on your shirt."

But as it stands, the worm has the upper hand. Somehow he understands me. I am able to sense that much. And you know that if I tell anyone this, they will take it as but a furthering of my madness. But you must surely have begun by now to see that I am quite sane - super sane. And very soon now I will speak with the worm, and then all things will be well again. Patience. We have much to talk about, he and I. He is in the apple again, peering out at me. He winked.

* * *

The changing time:

Rautist died first. And so some wishes do not come true. It was on the night of their wedding - 27 years before her death - as Vespil was finally feeling that complex blend of longing and grainy fear (a special feeling that was for Vespil love) toward Rautist that he expressed to her his dilemma.

"I am now illequipped to live without you," he had told her under transparent hotel linen.

"You won't have to," she had assured him. Though he had!

Of course, her careless error should not provoke our anger, although it does. Through simple dietary alterations her death may have been forestalled somewhat, but it is unlikely that she could have shoved her end back beyond that of Vespil's. He will be far older than any of his colleagues at the "Home" before he passes on. Yes, plenty of time still there is to do it up pretty.

While he looks very much like a man near the end - cracked and mapped like ancient pottery - his insides are elastic, well equipped. Rautist, contrarily, appeared unblemished at death. But under the liquid skin her organs had dissolved. Worse still, it had hurt her physically. Between them there had been an understanding, emerging swiftly and obviously, that they were a team, synchronized in such a way that she could function solo if ever he dropped away (resiliency in these matters is mysterious), but he could not. Not without help anyway. Help from our friend, Mirow. Our buddy the worm.

* * *

Mirow again:

When Vespil moved in initially, he perpetually smoked. A Marlboro man. An annoying and disgusting habit. Particularly distasteful if you are an insect, like myself, clinging (cling is too strong a word . . . it implies a struggle - there was

none) to the ceiling. The smoke would bellow from his mouth in massive grey clouds and settle around me like netting.

But after Dr. Slantanton brought in photos of blackened and decayed lungs, Vespil smoked no more. Slantanton had crept into Vespil's room one night and carefully taped the photos in various strategic locales. The doctor had been flicking through some of his old T. B. journals when the idea came upon him. Tuberculosis you know, with ever widening black pits, eats at one's lungs. So these photos, graphic and intended only for the experienced and callous eye, drove home the Surgeon General's afore-ignored warning. When Vespil awoke on that morning, and for several days thereafter, he found these photos wherever he did turn. Why did Dr. Slantanton do this? I cannot tell you precisely, but I'll hazard a guess

* * *

Outside the "Home," alongside the winding sidewalk which runs from the near empty parking area to the double-glass-doored entrance, ants mill about in and on the sunned brown crust. They push near weightless boulders up out of their way, each moment bringing them closer to the completion of their uncompleteable task: perfection. And each being unaware of their own actions is naturally unable to be aware of Vespil's steady gaze upon them. And Vespil, unaware of his own actions, is secondly unaware of Mirow's unwavering gaze upon him. And again we see the passivity innate in us all. For as has been repeatedly and uncontradictingly maintained throughout this entire account is the immediate awareness of each individual's unfaltering attention to themselves.

So again we must begin. No progress made. What you have here is appearance - something that we normally must be satisfied with - but now you must take it upon yourself, with the aid of my friendly prodding, to use all information given to you in discriminating between appearance and fact. Such hand-holding behavior will not be repeated and further rescanning of the details will not be provided.

Getting Colder:

The wind on the roof of the "Home" swirls loosened shingle grit around the chimney pipes and hurls like anger these black bits down into the ventilation shutes and on into the room. Cold. Rubbing together along the way, the thousands become invisible and float onto the apple.

* * *

Mirow:

I'm reading your mind now, Vespud. I think that, yes, we will be talking quite soon. The skin on my body is beginning to thin and dry in this sterile air. And as you should have determined by now, my life has already far exceeded that time allotted to my kind. My demise is past due and tugging.

So please, let us not put off what should be made secure at once. I propose to you, my dear friend Vespud, an alliance. An immediate alliance between your own weary, distracted thoughts (oh, do not anger, Vespud. All that lives will not in time) and my own equally weary, but not so unkempt thoughts. Something for nothing? No, Vespud. You know that is not here the case. It is not a nonreciprocal gift I am offering but more a mutual transaction(s). You, discover, through my anecdotal theorizations, a means to your end that is painless and preferable, and I, in exchange, receive . . . brownie points? No.

No give-aways here, Vespud. Oh, my. You think that you hear me now, don't you? Look up, old man.

* * *

Vespud slides open his eyes and leans far back in the wheelchair. Loose neck skin nearly taut from his awkward stretch. The apple is empty. Eyes are pulled up toward a black, one inch length stuck to the ceiling, swaying in the artificial gust beyond webs of dust.

* * *

Again Mirow:

Are we off then? A spindly nod, Vespud, but an affirmative answer will not be shunned by me - not after the wait we have endured. And how is the arm strength today? We won't need to go far. The spot was selected with caution and exactitude before we were lichen on rocks, and all is progressing as it will. You'll see. You will. Patronization is never strong in my kind, so for both of our sakes, my tissue paper skinned friend, roll, roll, roll, roll, roll, roll, roll, roll, roll out the door, roll, roll, roll, roll, roll.

* * *

An irregular course is made, like water running through sporadically irrigated fields, as the old man wheels his way down the corridor, drawing notice from none. The grey length of worm fits well behind Vespud's left ear - out of sight, yet tickling. Above each door the rounded mirrors tilt down like

hospital televisions: large, wrinkled faces watch Vespud from chairs, beds, the floor. Beyond the elevator, used for the discreet late-at-night removal of dead ones, and along the green tiled floor they roll closer momentarily (by the moment) to the double glass doors. Automation: they swing open. And through.

* * *

Vespud rolls:

Where are you taking me, worm? Why must we go outside? In the cold. Should I stop my arms from propelling my chair and I and this worm toward possible danger. Rautist! You are gone and with me no more. God. Good God! Will this drool never stop. Funny, isn't it, how sentiment can be ever present through life yet vacant at what would seem the most appropriate moments. Venturing a guess, I would have wagered my soul that talking to the worm (or thinking with him, I should say), as I will soon do, would conjure up the old dissociated sensibility and swell tears in my peepers. But I feel nothing at present. Oh, yes, there is a dull dreading somewhere within me. Please do not misinterpret, however. It is only my acute dislike for the cold that makes me a wee bit nervous about leaving the "Home," and not a concern for what information that he may choose to enlighten me with. With me. I feel nothing. Or the equivalent to it, anyway.

* * *

Out they are:

It is unusually grey, unnaturally dark for 2:00 p.m. at the "Home." Winter has achieved solid footing in Slantonton, and how intensely the old here feel its presence. Perhaps their decaying fat cells reduce their ability to buffer the cold wind, or perhaps they can (after so many years) no longer feel sufficient comfort in spring's rebirth to make winter bearable. Perhaps. Perhaps. Perhaps.

If we look closely we can see two parallel trails left in the snow by Vespud's chair. Small drifts blow into these wheel ruts, hiding his escape. Mirow's too. Starting at the double glass doors, where a significant drift is forming, the trail follows the sidewalk to the edge of the ever empty visitor parking plaza. Here an incline allowed Vespud the needed speed to bounce roughly off the walk and slide/roll some fifty yards over the frozen, slanting lawn to the creek edge. Now they sit - Vespud in his chair and Mirow still behind that pink, cold ear - on the bank. The ice isn't yet thick on the stream; in fact, out in the middle are gaping holes surrounded by raccoon paw prints. Frozen spittle doesn't bother the old man. Not much.

* * *

They talk in the cold:

- Well, Vespida, what taxes you, my old friend? Such sad features. Such blue lips. Is it Rautist - her memory, that is - which fetters you to dismay?

- Partly, yes, it must be.

- But there is more?

- Yes.

- Of course.

- May I be direct with you, worm?

- Oh, Vespida, if we are still not past these games, and if you may still not be straight with your insect buddy then take me back inside the "Home."

- It is hard.

- Yes, but must we then die from this cold before we . . .

- It is hard.

- Vespida . . .

- It is so hard to open myself to further disappointment.

- Is it disappointment you fear then?

- Yes.

- Exclusively?

- Yes.

- . . . or is it something more devastating that makes you withhold your questions? My how this wind dries the elasticity from me. Even behind your ear, out of the full brunt of the breeze, I cannot fully escape.

- More devastating how?

- Must I tell you what you already know?

- More devastating in what way?

- I have not all the answers.

- But you do know from where my torment stems?

- Torment, is it?

- Yes or no, do you know?

- Of course, my crinkled chum.

- Please. Make me feel good again.

- You, more than others, more than all others with equally intense and passionate interests and concerns, must have answers? Why?

- It's not that I am more deserving . . . but the answers are more attainable. You have them and this makes them close.

- Correct, Vespida. And this closeness is, in fact, reason enough. I will help you.

- I have waited and waited . . .

- Yes, crying seems appropriate. Go ahead and leak. How pretty the drops appear. How tight they freeze your eyes. Oh my, we have been spied - betrayed by the "Home" patrons and must hurry. Are you listening, old man?

- Yes, I am.

* * *

Spotted:

Miss Corkerinitz sees them first. Often she will sit there - sit there by the picture window in the dining chamber, staring at the stiffened summer flies between the frosty glass panes.

"In the spring," she says to Dr. Gontz (asleep and twitching in his chair), "them flies will come back to life in the spring. Just you wait. The flowers will come on up, leaves will pop out all over the trees, and the sun, why the sun will hit them frozen flies and sure enough . . . Sweet Jesus! Outside there. Someone's got hisself outside! By the creek."

* * *

Frozen Mirow:

- You feel better, Vespida, yes?

- Perhaps.

- Perhaps?

- Perhaps.

- Now tell me, are there any additional puzzlements? Any other questions you have for me, your insect pal.

- No, Mirow, but may I ask additional questions about this cosmic significance of which you maintain I am a part.

- We are each a part of it, and, no, you may not.

- Why not?

- Two reasons. First, it is not a cosmic significance - I never said it was - I merely stated that you are here because you should be. How you feel and behave is your own . . . oh, do not make me repeat and repeat this. And secondly, because we are captured. We are separated.

* * *

The orderlies are more angry than concerned as they race across the courtyard toward Vespida. By the time he is discovered and retrieved, the old man is blue, indeed. And Mirow is black and silent.

How roughly they treat our friend. Rather than pushing him back into the warm "Home" they pull his chair backwards over the snow and ice. Vespida nearly bounces out of his seat. No doubt it is this coarse handling that is responsible for Mirow's tumble from the safety of the car. Yes, the chair bumps sharply the luncheon chamber entrance as it makes its way - thundering - toward the nurses' station. And this bump disjars our little worm, sending him sailing down to the tile like a burnt french fry.

Down he falls and is nearly run over by Dr. Gontz's chair as he hurries to see what has happened to poor Vespida. The worm lies there (still silent) for some time before Miss Corkerinitz discovers him in the dust. The swirling dust. How did she find him? Please, may we just say that she found him and leave it at that.

"Why frozen clear through," she tells Mirow, "just like my flies."

Mirow stays quiet.

"We'll fix you up good as new, we will," she says. No one thinks it odd that she lifts the innermost glass in the luncheon room picture window and slides Mirow under. Now he keeps company with the flies. None of them talk. And none of them care.

"Come spring," Miss Corkerinitz says to herself, "them flies and that worm'll warm fine and be thankful to me."

* * *

Vespida in spring - cheerier now somehow:

Perhaps I'll go down and see how my little friend is doing in his window incubator. Such a sunny day; such an ideal day to warm him back to life. Or should I say, "warm him back to consciousness," for he never died, you know, just stiffened to sleep, you know. Yes, a look-see I'll have at my friend. My greetings I'll extend, my best wishes and my thanks. My arms, I suspect, will cooperate and follow my instruction to twist my wheels toward the dining chamber, the window, the worm.

* * *

As the afternoon grows darker a rectangular shadow, cast from the "slow 5 MPH" sign in the guest parking area, edges over the scrambling contents between the picture window panes. The flies are alive. Alive and hungry after their frozen sabbatical. Such disgusting and filthy insects, yet see how charitable they appear. Even now they each take their turn, waiting patiently while passionately in line. Each fly is instinctively aware of the appropriate allotment of worm they may tear off from the beast (oh, our illfated friend). Enough flesh for several days' nourishment. He was so fat for the winter. Juicy dry.



druid's cave

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Poems by . . .

Andrew Bendelow
Teresa Bossert
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Scott Homler
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Terri Stone
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Don Taylor
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Helen L. Walker
Gerry Weber
M. H. Withrow

Fiction by . . .

Cynthia Capodice
Brian Daldorph
Jeffery Duncan
Anne Hubbard Norton

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