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CONTENTS

Marcellus Leonard	
<i>A Feather From A Clipped Bird's Wing</i>	3
Verna Ayn Catalano	
<i>Shakespeare's Sister</i>	5
Maureen Shannon	
<i>Carrying Reverence For Wildlife Too Far</i>	6
<i>Eye Traps</i>	6
Mary Leen	
<i>The Last Of A Tribe</i>	7
Betty Beatty	
<i>Monument</i>	8
<i>Routine Cleaning</i>	9
Tina L. Thomas	
<i>Dream Blue</i>	11
J.P. Tria	
<i>The Bitterest Pill</i>	12
<i>Understanding Anger From The Last Word</i>	13
Paul Garrison	
<i>Plate Techtonics</i>	14
Holly Aarys	
<i>All the sick pretty boys with their</i>	18
Ron Schneidwind	
<i>A Picture Seen</i>	19
<i>Finding Myself</i>	19
Tammie M. Johnson	
<i>Father-Daughter Abstraction</i>	20
Richard J. Hobin	
<i>Line Dancing With Gun</i>	21
Tom O. McCulley	
<i>Another Way Of Looking At Things</i>	22

Peter Savio	
<i>Dead Limbs</i>	24
Jonathan Guzzo	
<i>Perseid Meteor Shower—Under The Infirmament</i>	29
<i>Air Mass</i>	30
Ana Pattacini	
<i>The Ship II</i>	31
<i>Lightning</i>	31
Edward Picha	
ISU's 1988-89 Brome Award Winner	
<i>Summer Solstice</i>	33

A Feather from a Clipped Bird's Wing

The refrigerator clicks, cycles on and hums. All night it whirs—the sounds of wings and space ships landing and taking off. Dreams visit me, but you never will. Barefeet jerk me out of bed, out of the womb warm darkness to stumble across cold tiles to colder light. A fumbling—warmth drains down through me—a memory that never was. If I had held you, even once, then you could go. I would swear to never take you back, but that would be a lie. Empty as hollow laughter, the toilet flushes. I grope back to a single bed. 3:45 a.m. Electric blue glares from the microwave clock. You are out there somewhere in the unused night, but I cannot know where, not even in my thoughts. For me you are unknowable. Now the refrigerators switches off trembling. A deeper hum cycles in my head numbing the house. If only I could stop you from circling in my brain, I might be free. But you keep cycling like the seasons, brown and golden as light, laughing and shimmering like grain growing in a field of wild flowers. Bare seeds—my heart scattered by the toe of your sandals, scuttles across cobblestone courts or softly treads down in the winter park grass. Your voice sweet as a cat's purr, after a twenty year dream still stalks me down the night and hunts me like a cat. Brown as a lily bulb, you, black hair wind-roughened as a taffeta skirt, are everywhere—at Valois, in Smedley's and The

Baroque. Your lips droop into an easy smile,
 then drop a sneer as hot as wax to sadden my
 eyes. Yet I still walk toward you holding
 back a little bit. You wear me for a feather
 in your hat not realizing I'm there having
 clipped me from a bird's wing.

Verna Ayn Catalano

Shakespeare's Sister

yes, she said
 and smiled a red
 line carved into her chalked
 face.
 I don't know when I'll go
 she looked at the crossroads before her
 but I'm happy here
 so I might stay a
 while
 the cold arms of the night
 embraced her
 with sharp ice-fingers that cut
 into her throat
 I know I have to go
 but it's so nice here
 yes, she said
 and smiled, and nodded her head
 when warm red blood
 from her wrists stained
 the clean snow
 it's nice here...
 but I really must be going

Carrying Reverence For Wildlife Too Far

Thank the Lord I missed.
 The racoon must have had a death
 wish when it darted from the mist.
 My car is in the ditch. I am
 in a cast, coon's alive to try
 again.

I guess that's good.
 But there is a conspiracy:
 racoons, possums, rabbits, cats,
 dogs, squirrels, snakes, turtles,
 frogs—all trying to make me
 a fauna flattener.

I shall resist.

Eye Traps

In the ditch red eyes
 gleam. A creature cringes,
 hunkers down, tries to resist,
 overcome, the lure of my car beams,
 hypnotized by white light on dark
 road as I, red-eyed with stress,
 pain, need for sleep, barrel
 into black oblivion unable
 to resist the lure of
 red eyes in the ditch.

The Last Of A Tribe

Without fear the three last women smile
 from the Amazon river bank. *Found.* They
 knew exactly where they were: in no-man's
 land, a forest world without men. Their
 quick faces help them speak a language of trees,
 wind, mud, spoken only to themselves.

I know a man who seems to communicate
 in another tongue. A waitress asks about his
 meal, slumps through his reply and turns
 to me for a translation. He enters a room
 of quiet conversation, moves from voice
 to voice. I hear each present an argument
 to obliterate his alert presence, his quiet
 awareness of secrets.

The forest women chant at the white-winged
 giant gliding toward them. It slows
 and quiets; they speed their incantation
 to utter it out of the world.

Monument

I am but one in a long line of
caretakers.

Removing china piece-
by-piece, I examine the empty cabinet
for signs of wear and dryness. My
fingers are drawn as always to touch
the raw crosscut saw marks at the back
and I am reminded of the angry red
raised scar across my abdomen.

The tree that formed this walnut
cabinet must have been enormous,
difficult to cut, yet it grew from
a seed much smaller than the bottle
cap I hold in my left hand.

I pour
the golden English oil precisely into
the center of the cloth I've torn from
my husband's worn t-shirt. Soft,
it will not scratch the wood.

Hand follows hand as I slide the cloth
reverently across the hard wood, cover
every inch, feel the smooth, savor
the ripe fragrance.

No seed from my womb
will inherit this rite or borrow robust
life from burnished wood. Before this
cabinet passes from my hands, I must rub
hard to leave my mark —take good care
to be remembered.

Routine Cleaning

I've started talking
to myself.
Ponderances.
Halting conversations.
Lengthy dissertations.
Although
it hasn't solved that much
I don't feel quite
as isolated.

It began that way with Evelyn.
First she hummed a lot
progressed to mumbles
then to rambling conversations.
One day they found
her wandering down
the streets of Edenville
stripping as she walked
throwing clothes into
the shopping cart she pushed —
talking to herself.

When she began to shout
obscenities and offer
herself to strangers
the authorities picked her up —
ordered her out of town.
Her husband took her
to a sanitarium
where they shocked her brain numb.
Made her normal.

Occasionally
as an errant word

slips out of my mouth
I catch you watching.
Wary.
Ready for a good excuse
to shock my brain numb too.
Leave my mind
a tidy place where you can
visit. Comfortably.

Dream Blue

As I walk into the space
which belongs to me

The blue chairs stare

Four corners of the room
have eyes that watch me

I smell the wicker of their mouths

They smell the white liquid
which pours into my drinking jar

And the clock chimes four

I lie down to sleep but
They follow me to my dreams

Their wicker mouths breathe on my neck

I see them stacked
all four
burning

As the grin of a murderer sweeps over my face

The smell of blue blood
covers me as they struggle
for life

One tear
only one
I shed in this act

The blue runs up the walls
slowly
and they die.

J.P. Tria

The Bitterest Pill

I hold a lamp that shines light in your eyes,
Amidst a celt that quivers in my fist.
I watch a mad, mad world obsess and twist
My thoughts of bitterness and painted lies.
I cannot believe the words of the spies,
I ask the truth of where you've been and kissed.
You fail to answer, love grows like a cyst,
That weeps itself dry and finally dies.
Petal by petal you pick apart love,
As shades draw death to your rose on the sill.
You flaunt all the frill and lace that you sew.
The stem of us dies, the thorn kills the dove,
And I swallow the bitterest pill.
I am torn, hanging on; you are my foe.

Understanding Anger From The Last Word

In your reply to my "pretentious fiction,"
You say
I "dig" the tortured culture,
You say
I like the cloak and dagger,
The hopeless, bereaved and phantomed youth.
I'm the one who uses sacrilege,
To hurt all those friends,
Who love your body
and put your brain in a bottle
Who will tell your fortune?
Not me,
I belong to the wind of the tattered stick.
Shame on the moon who crosses your yellow brick road,
Dreams of fame are but a frocked hope.
Reality, that's you—all right,
Flesh rent out to the bone for
Whoever walks the yellow road alone.
Climb aboard the band-wagon,
"The Gang" will all be leaving soon.
They all "love" you.
Vanity, no
You are the chosen one.
Start over tomorrow,
in a new OZ,
another bar,
and another faceless bed.

Plate Techtonics

Do you remember, Linda, when I would wipe my pen in your red hair? It was the summer when I first unzipped my father's airline bag and set free its contents: number 2 pencils and wide rule notepads, long thick books about Freudian psychology and the history of the forty-eight contiguous states, black fountain pens and the dusty imprints of old blackboard equations, other desks and other children and the vibrations of the clock that told the time. I can still read the writing on the wall: The continents have shape because we give them shape; and the actions they perform have been created. Over a century ago a man named James Dwight Dana remembered a time one-hundred-and-fifty-million years ago when our world was one huge supercontinent whose sloping shelves extended outward and inward toward...White chalk on Black slate.

Now we all remember.

"Schizophrenia is a state of mind," said Mrs. Jones, "which facilitates a change in one's relationship to the world, which causes the abstract to become concrete and the concrete to become abstract." She was giving me a taste of her hairspray, checking to make sure I dotted each 'i'. "A state of mind in which the individuals begin to think that historical facts and events have special purposes or meanings for their own lives." The lines in her face indicated she thought this last notion was ridiculous. Do you remember?

It seems the things Mrs. Jones said had a powerful impact on the sixth grade. Manifestos replaced comic books and kickball games became raging debates between Freudians and Jungians. Do you remember little Anson Boozler and his ill-fated attempt to overthrow the principal's office? His shouts of "death to the ruling class" made the six o'clock news that very same night. And George Orwell. Do you remember reading Orwell? Oceania is at war with Eurasia. Oceania has always been at war with

Eurasia. We convinced ourselves we had been lovers since the tender age of four and found ourselves in the coat room biting at each other's earlobes while Mrs. Jones explained quantum physics in muffled tones on the other side of the wall.

I would wipe my pen in your red hair and twist it round one of the long tendrils just tightly enough to get your attention. And you never understood why each time it was not the same gentle rolling of pen, the same easy stroke of ink upon your scalp. But let me help you remember. You see, what was once one massive piece of land many many years ago began accumulating things—shrubs, trees, insects, fish, reptiles, mammals—things which began multiplying geometrically. Economist Richard Malthus and I proved that years ago. And, in response to this loading, the land began rising and sinking, necessitating a plastic layer in the white-hot interior of the earth on which pieces of this supercontinent could slide horizontally. It's all in our notes. The point being that the land, like the once dense universe and the still dense individual, began a process of division and set sail its parts in order to create and explore new possibilities.

"The mind is a state of schizophrenia."

I have begun taking insulin shots. A result of the strange dreams I've been having. Last night I had the craziest dream. I was standing in front of a mirror brushing my teeth and combing my hair with the water running. And it was me in the mirror, and the toothpaste tasted like mint, and the teeth of my plastic comb pulled loose the finely sewn hairs upon my scalp as I stood gawking at the grey roots. I dressed and descended the stairs for breakfast. A grapefruit and toast with margarine. I read the *Wall Street Journal* and rode the subway to work and the sky was blue and I could see blue jays outside the World Trade Center through the puzzle of blue smoke from a nearby pipe.

"HEBEPHRENIC. Hebephrenic. Make certain you spell it correctly. The most extreme form of dementia praecox, hebephrenia is characterized by a fear of persecution. Do YOU feel like a victim?" Mrs. Jones dug her bony wrists into the oaken snarls of my desk lid. "No ma'am."

We are more like the active volcanos in the South Pacific than the old Mountain Ranges who find their sloping, tortured faces suffocated on all sides. I remember one day at recess when you told me you wanted to know what the Big Bang was and we ended up in the coat room climbing over rubber boots to get at one another. And those last cold spring days when the metallic orange froth of our vegetable soup went billowing past chunks of cracker and salt like the dying crests of ocean waves. And the week I guarded the school crossings. I was playing the part. Shouting orders and halting traffic. Putting people on report. The whole bit. You must have seen me sending the other children back to the playground so they could start again and *try walking this time*. Some went to Auschwitz, some to Dachau. And when it came your turn to cross, I made you wait until your bladder burst, and stood rigid as a toy soldier while you pounded your knuckles against the little black gun which sparkled between my shirt and patrol belt like some gross extension of the tender skin above my pelvis.

"The United States of America is at war with the Soviet Union. The United States has always been at war with the Soviet Union."

We believe what we are told. I am told that insulin will cure me. So I take it. I'd tell all those white coats to go fuck themselves if it were not for my dreams. When I'm asleep it's all blue skies and blue ties and How ya doin' Harry? LOOK BOTH WAYS BEFORE CROSSING.

I remember reading somewhere that the patterns of the underwater flow of dikes and basaltic lava cause changes in the earth's personality. Causing *all* of the seas to spread and close as neatly and precisely as the Red.

"George Washington had teeth made of Cherry wood, and 2+2 equals two numerals and a plus sign. The moon is a special blend of natural cheeses, the earth is flat, and a woman named Margo Vespucci discovered America in 1942." Mrs. Jones had her dress

hiked up over her head and was dancing an Irish Jig. We had front row seats, the two of us, and I remember our desks moving mysteriously closer with each click of her heels until we were holding hands and singing "When Irish Eyes are Smiling."

We are young, Linda. We have always been young. Yesterday I had sex with Mrs. Jones atop the grainy, warping belly of her podium and, for one brief moment, it was as though all of the stars and planets and continents and schools and classrooms and fountain pens had rolled themselves into a ball. Do you remember Marvell? We had sex atop the scattered pages of a new generation, and she was still 45, and called me a bad, bad boy and asked me how you were doing. I could feel the plates inside my head drifting against one another as gravity pulled the fat of her lips to mine and the coastal plains of California sank slowly into the ocean.

All the sick pretty boys with their
fantasies and impure thoughts
I'd rather be something to somebody
than everything to nobody

And the pseudo-goddess waits
They file in one by one
spilling their dreams on the
oriental carpet

Only ask, please, before taking...

Is there reflecting of this
tragic passion flower and the
wilting roses and the candlelight
a blonde child desperately grasping
her slippery soul for her dear life

Or is there a piece of cold cut tin
burning into the wrist
A hunter for blood
Grinding like a stripper

There is never enough daylight
There never will be
There is no feeling so lonely as the night

I pray to the sun, don't let me fade away

A Picture Seen

In a moment's running
grey to white
impression shone,
light through a window
of sorts
inviting
a breath of color
and a daydream

I'll call indian:

You
the beads around your neck
and me
my bare feet and yours
faint traces
of rhythm make
in sweet brown dirt
and three thought words
entrust us
bare
as night falls

finding myself

blown by everything at once
and my stomach
a blender, is whirring
about nothing at all
tangled in brush and rolling
downhill like a

barrel with speed
 through involvement with
 this thing or that
 all turning and spinning
 and shaking inside me

Tammie M. Johnson

Father-Daughter Abstraction

I fantasized you, imagined
 bouncing on your knee, spilling secrets
 in your ear. But I could never get you
 in my largest, deepest daydream to take
 off your hat or sit down.

Now panes of glass have superseded.
 Daddy is dead. Father is born.
 Now we say love.
 Each other.

We never touch.
 But we could.
 Have.

Richard J. Hobin

Line Dancing With Gun

My feet, they dance on both sides of the line.
 The mirror smiles, as tears roll down my cheek,
 I wonder if the gun is loaded this time.

I shuffle along, empty songs mark the time,
 with my partner Smith and Wesson on my cheek.
 My feet, they dance on both sides of the line.

Ridicule at school, ignorant hatred lined
 with malice, slice me like a piece of meat.
 I wonder if the gun is loaded this time.

My parents yell an endless chorus line
 at me. I really think I am a Geek.
 My feet, they dance on both sides of the line.

Verbal downers are constant on me, battle lines
 at home and school won't hold anymore, I'm weak.
 I wonder if the gun is loaded this time.

I can not dance for long right on the line.
 Peace is moments away. Give trigger a tweak.
 My feet, they dance on both sides of the line.
 I wonder if the gun is loaded this time.

Tom O. Mc Culley

Another Way of Looking at Things

I pick up your daughter,
my black haired arms trembling
at the thought of crushing
her shiny whiteness,
she is newly wet from a bath
and though she is not mine
I dream for a moment that her
brooding blue-green eyes
have risen out of the dark
pool of my own past.
Looking up, she frowns
at me hesitation, tapping
me with fingers until a thick
towel finds its way between
us and I begin the ritual
of rubbing her hair, arms, belly
and then discover again
that alone, I cannot touch
her between her perfect
soft legs, cannot answer
the embarrassed question
of how a grown man dries
a five-year-old girl
there and throwing the towel
around her shoulders I call
your name and leave the room.
Later, I ask how it felt
to touch your wife
when you were alone in bed,
your fingers brushing against
her soft hairs before slipping
in for the kill. The edge

on your voice cuts
me as you swear
you cannot even remember
the color of her eyes.

Dead Limbs

On a rankling wintry night where white whooshes of snow and wind provoke the clicking of dead limbs against one another, Russell and Charlotte slap together their pale, naked skin in hopes of reaching some temporary biological agreement. A gleaming silence follows, but just as quickly as the friction of life begins, the basic treaty is renounced, and the two lovers once again fall victims to an overbearing and destructive consciousness. Their minds aroused with thoughts and visions, cataclysms and syllogisms, complications and contradictions, they hurl their bodies away from one another, off of the queen-sized into their respective corners. Planted opposite one another on the thick shag, they sink slowly into their all too familiar pre-coital depression. Though still somewhat stimulated by their momentary collision, Russell immediately conjures up visions of Shelly Duvall in his head, thus putting an end to the last remnants of visible sexual excitement. A numbing hush fills the room.

Several minutes pass until Russell finally speaks: "I hear Pat Sajak is no longer hosting the day-time version of *Family Feud*. Or is it the night-time version?"

"Day-time, I believe."

Silence follows as their minds work furiously to interpret this brief interlude.

Russell: *A brilliant tactical move, I must say. She knew all along that I was going to be the first to break the silence but she had no idea what I would say. I think I threw her for a loop, despite the fact that I know she'd a huge Pat Sajak fan.*

Charlotte: *Jealous, spiteful bastard. He knew all along that I was fantasizing about Pat Sajak in a white Speedo during those last few moments. What's his game, anyway? What's he up to?*

Russell: "I hear he's sleeping with Vanna." *This ought to really get her!*

Charlotte: "Vanna's sleeping with Bert Convy, she doesn't have time for Pat." *I hate him, that worthless slug. If only he knew about my love letters to Pat.*

Russell: "My left elbow itches, and I have no idea why." *Probably something she gave me.*

Charlotte: "The human body is like a weak story. If there is one part that annoys, then the rest of the story sucks." *What made me say that, I wonder.*

Russell: "Quite right." *What made her say that, I wonder. Who is she trying to impress with her feeble attempts at metaphor? What does her statement have to do with my excruciating itch? She thinks that I suck, is what it is. And that I annoy. She thinks that I'm an annoying suckwad from hell...Bitch.*

Charlotte: "I heard a good story the other day. Or maybe I read it. I can't remember." *He knows I hate him but he thinks I love him. He can't see me and I can't see him. Why can't he read me? I suppose he's aroused now, with all of this talk about Vanna.*

Russell: "You shouldn't read so much. It clouds your judgement." *She can never remember anything. I know she thinks that I love her even if I hate her. Or is it the other way around?*

Charlotte: "Have you heard that Elvis is dead?" *Though his spirit will live on, unlike our love.*

Russell: "Yes, I heard something of the sort....Many years ago I believe." *Damn her! She is signalling the death knell of our relationship by dredging up foul memories of the King's demise!*

Charlotte: "He dies for me everyday, rotting, like so many bugs in the light fixtures."

Russell: "Oh Christ! I knew I forgot to do something today!"

Charlotte: "You did remember to clean the light fixtures today?"

Russell: "No, my sweetest, I forgot." *Why do I always have to clean the light fixtures?? Once again, she's forcing me*

against my will to adhere to my well-defined social role as the cleaner/fixer-upper. It's her subtle rhetoric, her sing-songing rhythms that dominate and haunt me.

Charlotte: "No problem, my dear, get to them when you can."

Russell: Blast! She's doing it again! I must do something.

Russell: "I was thinking the other day, in my waking sleep, breathing in the night air, that the only possible replacement for Pat Sajak can be Dan Quayle. Or Wink Martindale."

Charlotte: "I think he's dead."

Russell: "Quayle or Martindale?"

Charlotte: "Yes." *Death. The uncertainty of it all. Much like love. They frighten us at first, until we learn to accept them. Then monotony arrives, and stays for eternity. Or at least for lunch.*

Russell: "Sartre said--or was it Nietzsche?--that death is like a train that we sooner or later have to board, whether or not we have correct change. Actually, it could have been Mike Tyson who said it."

Charlotte: *I bet that he thinks he's Mike Tyson, the poor fool. And that I'm Robin Givens. That bastard! He thinks I'm stealing him blind, robbing him of his riches. Some riches. Ha! How much riches can someone working the drive-thru window at a Mister Donut have? Robin Givens! Christ! He's being so obvious. Still, at least I have all my teeth.*

Charlotte: "I hear the Mets are shopping Mookie Wilson around." *That reminds me, Target is having a clearance sale on jodphurs and Jolt.*

Russell: "Yes, and I hear the Mariners are interested." *I'm sure she's thinking of doing some shopping later. And spending more of my money, of course.*

Charlotte: "Where does the time go?"

Russell: "It goes on."

Charlotte: "Whatever became of me?"

Russell: "I'm not sure. I haven't seen you around much

lately." *Why would the Mets get rid of Mookie? It doesn't make much sense.*

Charlotte: "And yet the big question is 'if.'" *If only you were a foot taller and a mile cuter.*

Russell: "Whatever happened to 'why'?" *Like why the fuck am I listening to you when TBS is running reruns of Gilligan's Island.*

Charlotte: "'Why' went the way of Joan Rivers and the T-Formation. Time doesn't march, it oozes. Like a slug."

Russell: *Is she calling me a slug??*

Charlotte: "We wait 'til the cows come home with our questions of 'why?'. And even then the table isn't set and the dishes are still in the sink."

Russell: *What the hell does she want me to say to that?*

Charlotte: "Hence, we usher in the new era of the 'if'. 'What if?' asks Hewlett-Packard. *They are the new philosophers, Russell. Not us. We never were.*" *I'm chilly. I wonder what ever happened to the Captain and Tenille.*

Russell: "My optometrist tells me that I should stop placing lit cigarettes on my pupils. Should I get a second opinion?"

Charlotte: "There is no right or wrong. There is only opinion."

Russell: "Precisely.." *What difference does it make, anyways? Sight is only necessary for the weak. Vision is what's most important. An eye for an eye, I say.*

Charlotte: "We waste our lives searching for truth. For correct answers. For making sense out of chaos. Perfection is a myth. An illusion. It is like four cars making right-hand turns simultaneously at a four-way stop. We live our lives waiting for such preposterous events." *Like the mythical love we share, which is made up of nothing but left turns.*

Russell: "Yet it is in the pursuit of such perfection that we find the very well-spring of happiness. Just ask Keats."

Charlotte: "I can't. He's dead."

Russell: *Another allusion to death! She is so*

preoccupied with the dying that she has no time for living. I have to pee.

Russell: "Do you have the time?"

Charlotte: "Half past eight." *I better remember to pick up some stamps tomorrow.*

Russell: "A poem just flashed through my mind." *Actually, I wrote it thirteen years ago.*

Charlotte: "I would love to hear it." *No I wouldn't.*

Russell: "The lapping of your tongue
 Warms me like yak dung
 The slapping of your thighs
 Makes me realize
 The lifeless way we heave
 Our hearts out on our sleeve
 Like maggots in our brain
 We funnel like a drain
 Into the great abyss
 "Mind if I call you sis?"
 We bundle together
 In all kinds of weather
 And crinkle in our past
 Oh, life just goes too fast!
 We live our lives
 just like
 dead limbs.

Charlotte: "It's beautiful." *It sucks.*

Russell: "I love you." *I think.*

Charlotte: "And I love you." *I do.*

The wind dies down and the snow lands more evenly now, its path obstructed only by the branches clawing their way out of the great oak trees. The clicking has ceased and the air is still. Inevitably, though, the wind will pick up again, and the oceans of our lives will rock our ships to life. And somewhere, in the murky past, a small child takes one step forward, and two steps back.

Perseid Meteor Shower--Under The Infirmament

Only one I saw; and
 That on the night of
 The hottest bathing.
 It skirted past the
 moon, a solitary flare
 hurtling from its whistling station.
 We are buried in air on the drive.
 The moon hangs in its cold cluster—A
 butcher's thumbnail, blood in
 a curl, caught and held fast.

It was hot—hot all that
 summer. We were circled with
 humid-air winding sheets. I
 hungered like Cain, day and night.
 The sky circled above me.
 Above the drive, Pisces
 hung from its damp tail
 whispering love and death.

And the moon.

One, I remember, broke
 Free that night—shot
 past its brothers.
 This is how I would
 go, at my time—
 In nuclear blast furnace
 roar. Stream of white behind
 to remain green against the
 eyelids of watchers.

The summer ended in heat—still heat.
 And the moon is crying in its cradle.

Air Mass

Freddy Herko danced "Sanctus" in the air
 Today. He locked all of them out and sent
 Mozart alone in the sky, in the glare.

Before that, he'd locked himself away there
 In the closet, among bangles he went.
 Freddy Herko danced "Sanctus" in the air.

Everybody knew it. How, why, when, where.
 He used amphetamine. Think it was meant?
 Mozart alone, in the sky, in the glare.

And haze of Cornelia Street. They stare
 At his body, at the broken pavement.
 Freddy Herko danced "Sanctus" in the air.

So. Freddy dead, all weary, they will pair
 Off, twenty-six, go to the apartment.
 Mozart alone, in the sky, in the glare.

In the end, just Freddy. He paid his share
 To the sidewalk. Not a bad denouement.
 Freddy Herko danced "Sanctus" in the air.
 Mozart alone, in the sky, in the glare.

The Ship II

The ship sails
 and is lost—
 it has no will
 of its own
 of direction
 or destination.
 It's transparent
 to the waves
 that swell
 and diminish,
 and who do not
 know or care
 if the ship sails
 and is lost.

Lightning

The city is hidden
 under the trees.
 But if you know
 where to look,
 you can catch
 a glimpse
 of the heroin-filled veins
 that light up
 the sky
 at night.

Edward Picha

Summer Solstice

The tide is licking the beach clean as it recedes. I sit, ignoring my breakfast, and watch as it tries to swallow a few daring gulls that pick at the meat from regurgitated shells. They jump up just in time, not even getting their feet wet.

My mother sits across from me, spooning out the heart of a grapefruit. I watch her reflection on the glass table, not wanting to look at her directly. She unfolds her napkin, dabs the corners of her mouth, and places it over her image on the glass.

She's the only person I've been near in almost two months except for Janine, our housekeeper, who has been around for the past twenty-two years, three years before I was even born. It was Janine who raised me, and I think of her as the family that I never had. My father died in a car accident on his way to the hospital the day I was born. And although my mother continues on, I have yet to know her. We usually only see each other at breakfast every morning. Our relationship is like that of two strangers who take the same bus everyday.

I've pretty much learned to accept this. Janine says that before my father died that he and my mother were always laughing and carefree. I've never even witnessed my mother crack a smile. But I know Janine is not exaggerating.

Until I was ten, I had always wondered why there were no pictures in the house. From what I'd heard, my father had been quite successful as a free-lance photographer. One day my best friends, Blair and Alex, who lived on the beach on either side of me, had gone away with their parents for the weekend. Left alone, I decided to play in the attic and search for treasure. I'd always wanted to find a secret room, the kind where you push a knothole and the wall spins around. As I was searching, I tripped over a large box that had been shoved into the shadows. Rummaging through it, I found hundreds of pictures of my mother and father. They were buried between dusty copies of *Life* magazine.

Illinois State University's

1988-89 Robert Brome Creative Writing Award

Summer Solstice

by
Edward Picha

I spent the entire afternoon in an old, overstuffed chair and stared at each picture. The sun caught itself on some of the attic's crystal-cut windows and bled around me in warm trickles. The pictures seemed to come alive in the light, and I imagined myself in them, next to my smiling parents. It was the picture of my mother that shocked me the most; it was the first time that I saw her smile. She was so beautiful that she seemed almost a different person.

My father was also quite handsome. I studied his features and hoped that someday I would look like him. And at ten, I thought my mother would grow to like me if I did.

She didn't. I've grown to look exactly like him. If anything, this has made it even worse.

The wind chimes are whispering above my head. I made them about eight summers ago using shells and fishing string. Alex had taught Blair and me how to do it. Until recently, each of us had them hanging near our sundecks. When we were kids, we said that every time we heard them it meant that we were thinking of each other.

This morning they remind me of Alex. She and I had been walking on the beach drinking champagne from the bottle. My mother and Janine were gone, and I had taken it from the wine pantry. When we returned to my house, we sat on the sundeck and watched the moon. At fifteen, neither of us had drunk much before, and the champagne broke down our inhibitions rather quickly. She was wearing one of her bright, formless sundresses that her parents hated. The moon captured the glimmer in her blonde hair and aqua eyes. She smiled nervously as I unzipped the back of her sundress. I kissed her neck, breathing her scent. I felt her hands under my shirt.

"Do you want to?" I was nervous but the champagne helped.

"I'm afraid," she whispered.

"Of what? I love you."

"You know."

"I'll be right back." I ran to my room and got a beach blanket and a condom that Blair and I had bought the summer before in a gas station men's room. I never even heard the shell chimes until after we finished and lay wrapped together in the blanket, watching the night slip away.

My mother clears her throat and pushes aside her grapefruit bowl. "What are your plans for today?"

I don't want to answer her. "Nothing." It's what she wants to hear.

"Ann says she has to have an answer by today. I don't see why you can't just meet with her. She can offer you a lucrative contract. I've seen it. And you would be the premiere male model for her ad campaign." She says the last part as if I'd be impressed.

"I really don't feel comfortable..."

"And she said that you wouldn't have to worry about working with anyone but intelligent, straight kids..."

"I think I'm gay," Blair said.

"So what, I think I'm straight," I responded with a dead-pan face.

You took that easier than I thought," he said smiling. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

You'd go on."

He remained silent.

We sat in his room listening to New Order and watching MTV with the volume off.

"When did you find out?" I asked.

"I think I've always known, but it never mattered before."

I stare at my mother with disbelief. "I was going to say that I don't feel comfortable having my picture taken."

"I'm just relaying a message," she says, sitting calm and expressionless. "Do you plan on doing anything this summer? You've already been on vacation for two months."

"I dunno. Today, I thought I'd sit in my room and make grave wreaths." I'm shaking with anger. "Would you like me to make you one for someone?" Not even this could breed a response

on her cold face. I get up from the table, weak-legged, and walk to my room. Janine is standing near the deck's sliding door and I catch her eye before I enter. I think I see a tear.

Once inside my room, my eyes fall upon the lava lamp that sits in the center. Everything in the room is white except for the lamp which has red, expanding splotches. The splotches spread like scarlet amoebas, splitting apart to dance alone in their pool.

I haven't turned the lamp off in two months. I sit before it and can feel its heat against my face. Again, I recall the night that my life was ripped apart, and I become as alone as the dancing amoebas.

The tequila bottle glinted in the moonlight. I held it up against the night sky but couldn't spot the bulbous worm that floated somewhere inside. The thought of it sliding through my pursed lips as I drained its warm bath made me shudder. I handed the bottle to Blair, who sat next to me, our legs dangling over the sundeck's edge. The shifting blackness of the ocean lay before us in the distance.

"Here's to making it through our first year of slightly higher education."

"It wasn't what I thought it'd be like. Everything changed." He took a large gulp of tequila. We'd drank enough for everything to seem gauzy, but the cool sea breeze tore at our protection. It was our first weekend of summer vacation. And also the first time since we began grade school that Alex couldn't be there to help us celebrate. She'd gone to her favorite aunt's funeral in Vermont with her parents.

I had only met her Aunt Jesse a few times, but I'd liked her from the start. She was outspoken, intelligent, and incredibly beautiful. She lived in a house that she built herself. I never saw it, but Alex said that it was the most wonderful home she'd ever seen. The last time I saw Jesse, she and Alex told me about Alex's first visit to her home in Vermont when she was only eight. Jesse had called Alex's parents after learning of their trip to New York and invited them to see her new home. She also warned them to rent something that could take them through the

rugged terrain that hindered smooth passage to where she now lived. Alex's mother had always scoffed at the fact that Jesse, despite her wealth as a successful writer, drove everywhere in a mud-caked jeep, her auburn hair blowing freely in the wind.

When the three arrived at the airport in Montpelier, Alex's mother refused to take Jesse's advice, not risking her new perm. Instead, they rented a black Cadillac and began their drive on a newly built highway. It began to rain as they turned off the highway onto a blacktop road that edges were crumbling. About twenty miles later, they turned on Adrienne Road, which was more like a mud path with patches of gravel. Jesse lived a mile down this road. The Cadillac made it half way up. Alex's father offered to walk the other half for help, but her mother would hear nothing of it. She said that she wasn't going to wait in a dark forest for some boondock misfit to murder her and her child. The three of them began their hike, Alex's mother with three-inch heels and a copy of *Vogue* to umbrella her perm.

When they arrived, Jesse released a hearty laugh, especially enjoying the sight of her sister who, teetering on a broken heel, glared at her through the wet wisps of frizzled perm.

After drying off, they were introduced to Mimi, Jesse's house companion, who entertained while Jesse retrieved the abandoned luggage. Even Alex's mother became endeared to Mimi's delicate voice and cultured mannerisms as she relieved the tension by telling humorous stories about the hardships of livng in Vermont. When Jesse returned and heard all four laughing, she dropped the suitcases and hugged each one of them. Alex's mother broke free and ran to her suitcase, pulling out a silk scarf which she turbaned tightly around her head.

Later that evening, after bedrooms were delegated, Alex's mother expressed concern over where Mimi was sleeping. Jesse gave her sister a disappointed stare and said that Mimi would sleep where she always slept, with her. Alex's mother gasped and told Alex to go to her room. For the next hour, Alex heard whispered screams about mortal sin and eternal damnation.

She'd never heard her mother talk about religion before. She wondered what her aunt had done wrong.

The next morning the three of them left quickly. Aunt Jesse had gotten up at dawn and pulled the black Cadillac out of the mud. She kissed Alex good-bye, and vowed to write and visit her favorite niece soon. Alex's mother said she could visit if she came alone. Mimi stood at Jesse's side, leaning against the open door. Looking out the car's rear window, Alex knew that it would be a while before she saw her aunt again.

"Alex called from Vermont today," I said. "She said that she wished she could be with us."

"Did they have the funeral yet?" Blair asked.

"Yeah, it had just gotten over. She said there were hundreds of people there. And Mimi sat in the front row dressed all in white except for a red carnation."

"I want everyone to dress in white at my funeral," he said, taking another swig of tequila. "If anyone even shows."

"That's a cheery thing to say. Like you're going to die anytime soon anyway."

"What's the big deal? Everyone gets so upset about death. Like with Alex's aunt. She was suffering. Why is it so bad that she died?" He had an earnest look on his face which didn't reach into his eyes, as if he was trying to convince me of something that he really didn't believe himself. "Death is better than pain."

"Yeah, but pain isn't constant; death is," I responded, already feeling that the subject was too heavy for the night. "Why are we talking about this anyway?"

"Because of Alex's aunt. You brought it up." More tequila. "Don't you think it's unfair the way she died. I mean she got lung cancer and didn't even smoke. She suffered because of what those around her did; something she had no control over. I imagine that was the worst pain of all, her knowing that it wasn't her fault."

We were both quiet for a few minutes. I hated it when Blair got into one of his moods. Ever since we were kids, he would

do this. It would be a perfect day, and Blair would point out some dark notion that he'd been mulling over. Sometimes it would be days before he smiled again.

"Chris, I told my mom yesterday."

"Told her what?"

"About my deviant lifestyle," he said with a sarcastic huff.

"You're kidding? Did she freak?"

"Hell yes. She started crying and said she would disown me if my father found out." He paused, "Oh, and that she knew a good shrink that could help me like girls again." He stopped and turned away for a few seconds, biting his bottom lip. "I started laughing at her and she slapped me in the face. She's never hit me before. Can you believe it? I'm nineteen fucking years old and she's hitting me." A tear slipped down his cheek, and he tried to brush it away before I could see it. "All of a sudden, I have Joan goddamn Crawford as a mother."

We both laughed at this, and I was glad that he'd broken the tension. "You should've called me."

"I tried. First, I screamed that she couldn't beat it out of me no matter how hard she tried. You should've seen her face. Then I stomped off to my room and hollered that I was calling my boyfriend. She let out this goddamn shriek and took the phone off the hook in the other room. I was really only going to talk to you or Alex."

"You should've come over. I'm the expert at strained mother relationships, remember? She's just going to have to learn to live with it."

He remained silent. I could feel the tension build again. "How can I expect her to live with it when I haven't even learned myself?"

I put my arm around him. He gulped more tequila. I thought I saw the worm bobbing at the bottle neck before he brought it down. The black tide shifted closer. The shell chimes chanted.

"Remember when we were kids and we made those chimes. None of this mattered then. We spent our entire summers swimming and building sand castles. Remember, Chris?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"I'd do anything to have it back."

"Our lives are okay now, aren't they?"

He didn't answer. Instead, he swallowed another mouthful of tequila. I began to worry about how fast he was drinking. And I was sure I saw the worm this time.

"If you're not careful, you're going to be as pickled as that worm you're about to swallow," I said with a false laugh.

"There's no worm in this bottle," he said, not even lifting it to see.

"Really? I thought I just saw it when you drank."

"Why does there have to be pain at the bottom of everything pleasurable?" he asked wincing.

I laughed. "That's a melodramatic thing for even you to say."

He squinted a cold glance my way. "What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. It just sounded melodramatic. Cool off."

He brought the bottle up to his lips one more time. "I think it's you that's melodramatic." He purposely slurred the last word, as if to show he were still in control. "Besides, I don't want to cool off. I'm hot and bothered." His eyes were half-shut and he breathed the words with a mock pout. "Loosen up."

I laughed in spite of myself. He was drunk. "I think we'd better get you to bed."

"I've been waiting for you to say that for so long."

"You know what I mean." I stifled my laughter. We started to get up, but he wobbled and fell to his knees.

"I like the view from down here," he said with a sly smile. It was still all a joke.

"Get up," I said, pretending disgust.

"I'm trying, but it's going to take awhile. Be gentle."

"You're drunk and you're going to feel like an ass tomorrow morning, and I'm going to make it very hard on you."

"I hope so," he laughed. "Now just don't stand there, help me up."

I helped him up and he put his arm around me for balance as we walked to his bedroom.

"Chris, you're my best friend. I don't know what I'd do without you."

For a moment, I allowed myself to think that everything was going to be alright. We walked through the open sliding doorway and down the hall to his room.

"I love you," he said as we neared his bed.

"Don't do this, Blair." He pulled me down on top of him onto his bed and kissed me hard on the lips.

I pulled away. "I love Alex." I was suddenly scared of this person that I'd known almost all my life. "You'll find someone, Blair."

"No, I won't." His eyes were only half-open, but I could see that he was also scared of me. "Just get the fuck out of here."

"I'm sorry, Blair."

"Get out." He picked up the tequila bottle that he'd stood next to the bed and gave it a half-hearted throw in my direction. It landed at my feet and I watched as the yellow liquid pooled and a thick, brown worm snaked through the bottle neck, seeming to wiggle free.

I looked up at Blair. "Maybe we shouldn't see each other for awhile." He sat on his bed, not stopping me. I could tell from his face that he was holding back tears. I turned away and walked into the night.

When I got back home, my mother's bedroom light was still on. I went through the back door, punching in the security code, and avoided passing her room. Janine's lights were off, so I didn't have to worry about her. I felt guilty, as if I'd done something wrong, and I crept into my room. Once inside, I immediately tried to call Alex even though I knew there was no one home.

My thoughts then returned to Blair, and I pulled on my head phones and listened to something slow and lush. "Oh baby don't leave me there, with a low whisper windswept in the air..." A wave of tequila and music pulled me under.

I awoke almost three hours later with my headphones silent. I could hear the chimes outside my window. The tequila had worn off, and a vague headache had replaced it.

Again, guilt plagued me, and I picked up the phone to call Blair so that I could relieve it. No one answered. I hung up and tried again. Ten rings. Still no one. My mind raced. He might've just passed out. He could've hit his head. I had to find out.

I ran barefoot to his house. The black tide had almost swallowed the beach. The lights were on and the deck door was still open. I hollered his name as I entered. He was not in his room. I continued down the hall, opening doors. I found him in the guest bathroom. A thin silver blade still caught between the flayed flesh of his forearm. Long, dark vertical cuts divided his wrists. He lay naked, his skin as white as the marbled floor. When I saw his face I began to cry. He had bitten through his bottom lip. His blue eyes stared through me. My vision blurred, and all I could see was the expanding redness staining the cold, white floor.

I turned away, but still saw the spreading stain. It seemed to follow me down the hall into his room. The sharp tang of tequila assaulted me as I entered. Overturned at the center of the room, the discarded bottle lay with its neck pointing to the lifeless worm curled on the carpet. I must've called for help.

If I would've only stayed with him.

There was a note on his bed with my name scribbled on the outside.

This can't be happening.

I unfolded it, already knowing that its words would hold no answers.

I hope you get to read this. Please don't hate me for tonight. When you left, it was the last rejection that I could take. I imagined myself in ten years, still drunk

and alone. I couldn't handle it. The pain was coming from something that I had no control over. I couldn't live with it anymore.

I can hear the shell chimes outside my window. They remind me of the summer that we made them. Chris, when you think of me, think of those days.

Blair

I thought of those days with Blair until the sirens wailed, drowning out the shell chimes that stirred in the night breeze.

I was in the hospital for the next two days. I wouldn't talk to anyone and I hadn't shown anyone the note. They let me out so that I could go to his funeral. I thought about wearing white, but thinking it and doing it were two different things. I wore grey.

After the funeral, I went home locked my door, and unplugged my phone. After three days, I finally spoke, allowing Alex into my room. We sat in the dark for an hour and cried before she said anything.

"We're going to have to get over this." She caressed my cheek.

"I know."

"You can't blame yourself."

I started to cry again. I stared into the lava lamp which provided the only light in the room. "Do you remember when Blair won that at the carnival? I'd said that I always wanted one because they were tacky but kinda mystical."

Alex laughed. It sounded foreign. "You'd run out of money, and Blair was bound and determined to win one for you. He would have done anything for us."

I could still remember the disappointed look on his face as he kept tossing and tossing to win the lamp. But no matter how hard he tried he couldn't toss the ring over the right stick. I kept telling him to stop trying, that it wasn't meant to be. But he wouldn't listen, and he spent everything he had for it. With his last fifty cents, he closed his eyes and finally made it.

"I miss him so much, Alex. The three of us were a team."

She held me in her arms. "I can't believe he's gone either. I wish that I could've been here that night. What happened, Chris? I need to know."

I told her about the night he died, and I showed her the note. "I wonder how long he knew about his feelings for me?" I asked he.

"For quite awhile."

"What do you mean?"

"He told me last Fall that he was in love with you," she said quietly.

I stared at her. "You mean you knew all along?" I asked with disbelief. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"He made me promise not to. Besides, he would never try to break us up."

"Alex don't you think if I'd known, it would have made things a little easier for him? I can't believe that you didn't tell me."

"It wasn't your rejection, Chris. It was his rejection and his parent's rejection."

"And the last rejection came from me." Now that I'd said the words, there was no turning back. "I need to be alone now."

"No, you don't."

"I want to be alone," I said more insistently. I pulled away from her.

She brushed her lips against my forehead. "Call me when you need me." She left my room, and I again locked the door.

The next few days were a blur. My mother was gone on a business trip, and she'd given Janine a few days off for vacation. I remember calling a friend of my mother's who was an interior decorator and explaining that I wanted my room redone entirely in white. She shrieked, either over the novelty of it or the fact that I gave her only three days to complete the project. Fortunately, she accepted my mother's Goldcard.

I spent three days watching videotapes of Blair, Alex, and me. I had shot most of the tapes last summer. It took me the

whole first day before I could quit crying everytime Blair came into the picture.

I missed Alex also. But it was only the old Alex that I wanted back, the one I saw on the tapes. Without Blair, we were both incomplete. I continued to watch the tapes.

When my room was finished, I moved back in, bringing back only my clothes. The rest of the stuff I stored in the attic. Every inch of the room was white, except for the lava lamp which I had instructed to have placed in the center of the room. It sat, always lit, percolating red bubbles. I sat in a dark corner and watched it for hours at a time. My mother returned a few days later, saying only that she liked what I'd done to the room.

I've rarely left the house in the past eight weeks. And I again sit here watching the red blotches stain my white room. I haven't talked to Alex since that last day.

A few weeks ago, I went over to Blair's house. No one was home. I took his shell chimes that were still hanging near the sundeck. I ran home with them, knowing that his parents would never miss them. They now hang in my bedroom silent and almost unseen against the white walls.

I hear my mother leave for the agency in her BMW. Almost immediately there's a knock at my door.

"Chris, may I come in?" Janine calls out.

"Yes."

She walks in and I can tell that she's been crying too. "I want to say a few things to you because I've watched you grow up and I can't stand seeing you this way anymore." She says this in one hurried breath, as if she's been holding it back. I don't resist, and she continues. "I care a great deal for you, Chris, and it's killing me to see what you've been doing to yourself for the past two months. In a way, it's not your fault. When your father died, your mother reacted the same way. She still hasn't gotten over it. She just works and works and pretends there's no pain. Sometimes I hear her wake up in the middle of the night crying over some bad dream." She stops and I look at her, not believing that my mother could cry for anyone. "Chris, she's alone. And it may be too late for her. But it's not for you, honey." A single tear

fighters its way down her cheek. "You've done your suffering. Blair's gone. Don't make your mother's mistake. You have to quit living in the past. It's too lonely a world." With that, she walks out of the room, leaving the door open.

I don't know if it's Janine's love or the fact that she compared me to my mother, but something is forcing me to see the truth. All this time, I've been condemning my mother for exactly what I've been doing. I'm acting just like her.

My safe, little world has been cracked, and I realize that I must move quickly before I have a chance to reseal it. I unplug the lamp and take it to the attic. Its red bubbles begin to regroup as I lay it on a dusty shelf that shadows other memories.

Returning to my room, I pack quickly, gathering together only my clothes and my bank book. After loading my suitcase into the car, I run back for one more thing, Blair's shell chimes. On my way out, I notice Janine watching me from the hall. I walk over to her.

"Once again, you came through for me. Like you've done for all these years. You saved my life." I kiss her on the cheek, feeling myself smile for the first time in months. "Don't worry about me. I need some time away to see the real world. It can't be any scarier than being holed up in that room for the rest of my life."

"It sure isn't, honey. You're gonna find happiness. I can tell." She waves good-bye from the doorway as I drive away.

I stop down the road at Alex's house. It looks quiet. Walking around to the sundeck, I see that someone has taken down her shell chimes. Looking across the beach, I see her, her slim figure stretched across a beach blanket. I walk towards her, afraid, as if approaching a stranger.

"Alexandria."

She raises her head, bringing up a hand to shade her eyes. She remains silent.

"I've come to say good-bye." The waves rush, playing tag with the gulls. "I couldn't leave without saying good-bye."

"I'd thought you'd already left."

I watch her. She squints under the shadow of her hand.

Her tan is golden, several shades darker than when I'd seen her last. She looks older, her figure free of her usual formless sundress. "I'm sorry." I stop, unable to find words. "Have you been okay? You're looking good."

"I'm going to Europe next week. Travel for awhile. Once I get away, I don't think I'll come back."

"Maybe I'll run into you sometime."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm leaving too. I have to get out of here. This place will just never be the same."

"Maybe it will be the same, but we're different."

"You're probably right. Right now, I'm not going to think about it. Hopefully, never again. I just need a quick change. Maybe New York for awhile. Maybe I'll do some modeling."

"You hate to have your picture taken." She smiles, making my voice catch in her throat.

"I've changed my mind." Again, I stop. "Alexandria, I have to leave. I know it sounds stupid, but if we start talking I don't think I'll be able to go."

She nods. "I understand." She stands up and pulls me to her. We hug tightly, pulling apart at the same time. I turn away and begin to walk to my car.

"Maybe I'll see you in Paris," she calls out.

I turn briefly. "Maybe." I get back into my car, leaving quickly. I have only one more stop. The road along the ocean is empty, and I feel the warm summer wind carry me along.

I slow down when I reach my turnoff, hesitating before I actually turn. The cemetery's roads are narrower, tombstones lining their winding stretches. Bright wreaths freckle the lawn. I stop the car near Blair's grave. Getting out, I carry the sun-bleached shell chimes. I kneel at his shaded gravestone, seeing it for the first time. I wouldn't look before.

"Blair, I've finally come to say good-bye. I should've done this two months ago, but I didn't. It's taken me that long to forgive myself. You never realized what a loss you'd be to me. I've finally let those summer days become memories. It's time for me to move on."

I hang the shell chimes on a limb above his gravestone. As I walk away, I hear them whispering in the wind. Their music again brings back memories of Blair and Alex, neither of whom I'd see again. I wipe my eyes as I drive away, looking back only occasionally to see where I'd been.

weeds on the horizon

all is surface
i cannot see my hands
clasped behind you caressing
what must be your brains
and when i press you to me
the face that i see lengthens like evening
flattens
and in your eyes two white hands swim
desperately clawing for air
i am afraid you will burst like a ripe fruit
i want to scream
when i feel your hands
on the back of my head
pressing my face to interface

Robert Brown

Saturday Night

visions of Ruby, Azure, & Starlight
flicker on the wick of a wax finger
empty brown label smells of scotch,
beside half-tide glass

metronome rhythms of thrusting loins
slippery white sheets slide
as a burning, aching knot unties itself

lapping mouths caress in view
of milk-light pouring through open window

padded footsteps, clothes like rustling leaves
the Starlight flickers and she's gone

Mark Hootman

ROOTBOUND

your asparagus fern
slides out
of it's pot
dangles desparately
like knotted prison sheets
stretching to overcome space

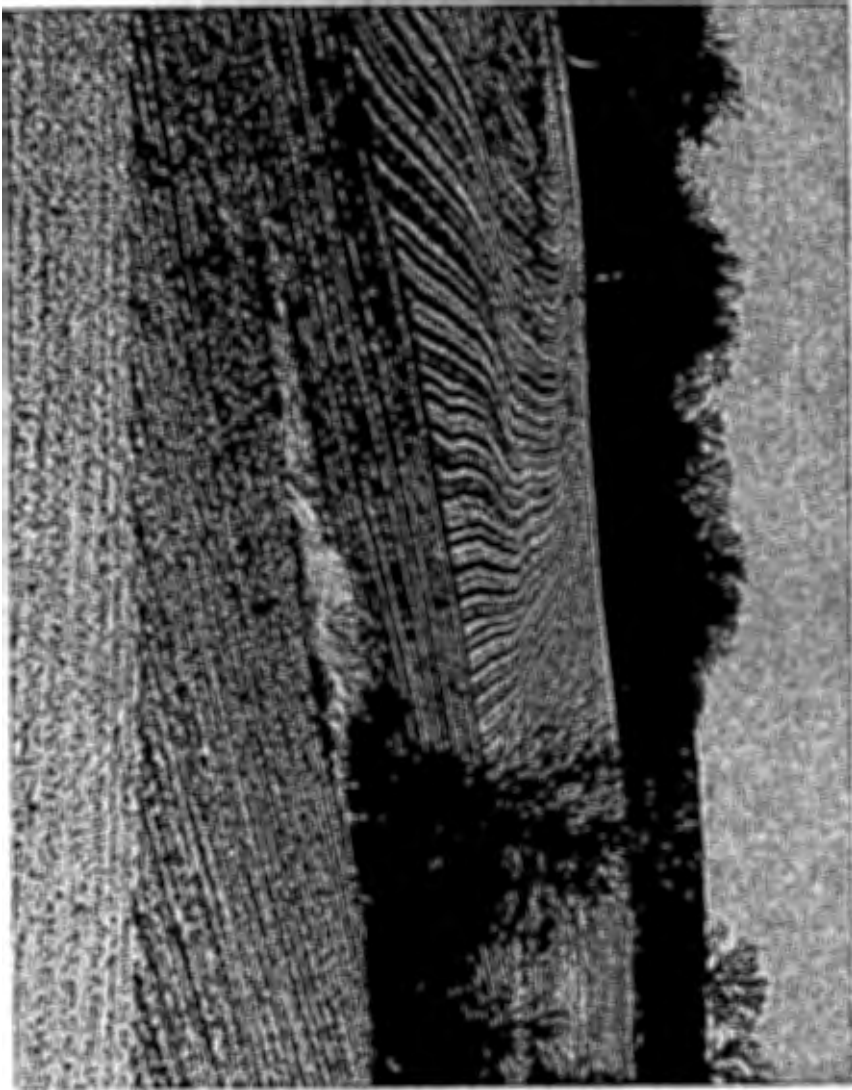
in the last lower
kitchen cabinet
your sprouting seeds
slouch on
spindly toothpicks
in fifteen carefully
cleaned cans

its no wonder
your love
makes me grow
peacefully
rootbound

Betsy Ferraro



Dan House



Dan House

When I Get Off

All the world's problems
which had been sitting there,
slowly attaching themselves like barnacles,
melt like warm summer ice cream
and slide slowly
down the back of
my skull.

Todd Perala

Fish Story
(for penny)

Poor
Baby Doo
Daddy
went a'fishing
and found
you

voidedwhiteflesh
rusting
floating like a
lily pad
in his favorite
lagoon

(green was always
her color)

a gift for
diligent papas
who give
their treasures
to young men
in tough jackets
and find them again
in mystical communion
w/Nature.

(green was always
her color)

Christine Allen

Walking Past the Apartment Complex

Coughing
At night
lightless
passing the wall.
The pigeons curdle
in nests
I hear a sound
coming over
the edge of the building
like sail tips
somewhere
I hear
claws at the brick.
Beaks.
I twist up my hands

One window lights,
shudder-quick.
A wild eye

Gregory Brosofske

Everything's in dust—
a bowl
four goblets
an imitation grecian platter
a picture of my father
a picture of my ex-wife.

On the other bed
Tom is sleeping.
I can see the bottom of his boot.
The wind blows
all four of his beetle posters
nod.

Out the window
some cars happen.
They sound like cars.

Gregory Brosofske

Snow and Jill
A slow floating under the trees.
Her left eye
closed.
Under the lid.
A bee.

Her thin nose.
Her black hair
in strands
black moonlight
in secret strands
At her feet.
Hands open, close
like fish mouths.
The broken skin.

A yellow eye
in the night
for the moon.
A white jaw
hung
on a limb of a tree
and snow,
the night
wind.
Panther
descends
like a nostril.
Yellow eye.
Brine breath.
Sleak gut.
Spitting up
something soft.
Just for Jill.
whose breath is black
against the snow

Gregory Brosofske

Up
in a birch tree. Hanging.
Her nose flattened
like at the window,
at the bark.
Her desire eyes stab red
in the dark.
Fingers
tight
round, around. Hanging.
like a wind chime
sweating black beads.
She's laughing.
There's a bird overhead.
A white wheel
spinning around her neck.
Chaffing.
music

Last night
she drank six cups.
She took a walk.
Without her glasses
down the railroad tracks.
She walked on gravel
and saw the tracks go straightly
She touched herself and found that she was wet. She slipped
on a tie and cut her cheek.
She lifted herself to her knees. Her hair was dry. She ran
her fingers through it. She pulled it out
in patches. Five patches. Off her left shoulder, something ran
in the grass that was dry. She couldn't see it and braided
the hair between her knees. She lit her hair. She breathed the smoke.
It started to snow.

Gregory Brosofske

Bulldozers

and years. the portrait
wasn't finished.
clumps of paint
fell off the canvas.
the easel waited
with the spiders
for the artist.

Mary McAlpine

i study history
to learn about women
who bound their feet
restrained their breasts
and sat in red velvet chairs

Mary McAlpine

POEM WRITTEN TWO DAYS AFTER A SUICIDE

I stopped at the white enamel stove one
step beyond the door, the two dirty cups
in the sink, in silence I swore they were
there

He said cardinals are songbirds but I was
too close to know, I only saw him nesting
with her under the walnut tree beneath my
window . . .

Maybe, *I* said later, cardinals become
songsters when they ride white pintos,
a lock snaps in place, while cursing my
release like the worn brass key clinking
relief on the white enamel stove one step
beyond the door; and a shot from the pond
on Wednesday

Anne Maddente