

to
we
er
S

m a g a z i n e

ART & LITERATURE

76

There is no force so powerful as an idea whose time has come.

—Everett Dirksen

Many of us pass through life allowing our creative pens to hover above the page. Others gaze into the blank canvas, if only for a brief moment to imagine this subjective fruit we call art.

This book is about those who let their pens bleed onto the canvas. Spilling conviction, doubt, humor, anger, and beauty, these artists have a voice and a talent to express their passion inside.

ART&POETRY



Sheep

b y D a v i d R i c h a r d

so, so, tired.

it's hard to stay awake

i still see sheep but they haven't the energy

for even one to jump over

the weight of the entire number

rests upon my droopy eyelids

i am the left side of the fence

my body sways back and forth

the sheep jump up but only land

back on my side

their hooves make prints on my forehead

i look older by the hour

henry by Brandon Bosch

Eye doctor, friend.

You made me giggle in your motorized recliner;
jokes doctors don't tell highschoolers.

When the cancer came,
you had to vacate
your home, your wife, your daughter;
their head colds would have toppled you
in your emaciated state.

When I peaked into your coffin,
you were less.
God had snapped you dead with his dish towel.

Henry, you fixed my eyes.
But your wife helped;
she'd been cheating for eight months,

and your daughter helped, too.
She still doesn't know your first name.





Untitled

b y M a r i n a I l i c



SKOT

My life is like a bridge,
old, worn out, torn apart.
Several boards missing in some places,
making it difficult to cross.
And I am, like a little girl on that bridge
holding onto the ropes on neither side,
trying to hang on to my soul.
Suddenly, the foundation breaks
and my life is being destroyed.
I try, I scream to hang on to my soul
with one little hope that I might survive.
I start to feel myself falling into an eternal pit.
Scared, hopeless, terrified, I reach out for someone
to save me.
And all is dark.



Running Man Dan Joppa

Warmth

b y H e i d i H e r m a n

The alarm sounds and I get out of bed
To gather my clothes from the unwarmed floor
I place them back on my body in the bathroom
Your bathroom is strange to me
with spicy soap-on-a-rope and razors strewn about
and a brown towel crumpled in a corner
The mirror is small, but I manage to push the bangs
away from my face
A thin, black comb sits in a cup, but I don't use it
I come back into your room and see my purse looped
over your desk chair hanging delicately between the spokes
I remove and cradle it, like a young girl
who's been teased by the big boys down the street
Placing it by my side, I leave your bedroom
and step into my heels by the front door
They stand above the other shoes left there
keeping a mothering eye on those pairs below her
as if to make sure none walk away
I open the door to see the sun large and fiery
beginning to wake and warm the earth
I close the door behind me and walk to my car
The sun seems to follow my every motion
even as I get into my car and drive away



In the Beat

b y S a r a W a l k e r

exhausted words
undue the tepid
reaction
gathered from an exchange
of meaningless information
transported by
duty to town and country
and lover.
Shear spice
in between
the cracks on the sidewalk
whispering
old ladies gossip
and talk of
concern for fellow man
and woman

but this haven of bullshit
is penetrated only by
imagination of challenge-
uninspiring
the weak lie flat in the dirt
collecting left over
thoughts
floating
down from the
scurrying inquiry above
licking
with tactile calloused tongues
propaganda
and advertisement
kissing each morsel of
disillusionment
knowing that each answer
comes only from
one source:
the dog's bark.

Untitled

b y S a r a W a l k e r

Mother reaches across that
fine line
to select a
pink flowered print towel-
wants only to clear up the spill.

Daughter puts her hands in the
ruby punch, pushes the liquid
in circles reminiscent of
finger painting-
Holds her palms out to mother's
scowl and creates
two prints on the
white wall.

One for you and one for I"

She wants to explain the impulse-
the burning desire.

Mother arms herself, placing
the printed towel to cover
the line of her life-

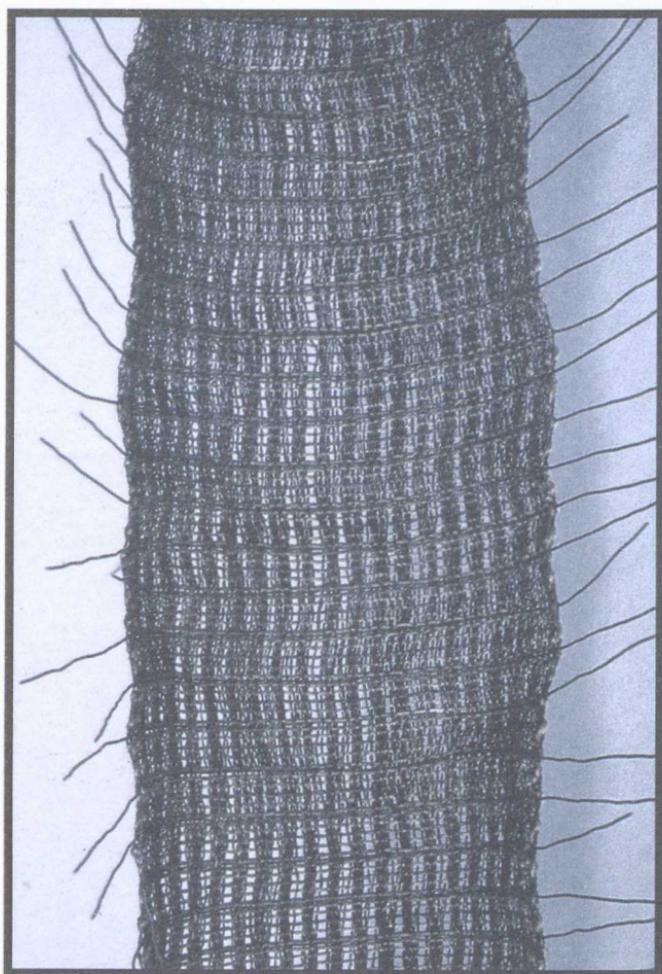
wipe your hands and help me
make it all disappear"

She watches as the redness creeps
along the towel-
the juice stolen from her flesh.

Bleach will cover the prints and
wash away the mess.



ASCENSION Michael J. O'Connor



Vulnerable Malley Cauter

The Mission

b y P h i l M a t s o n

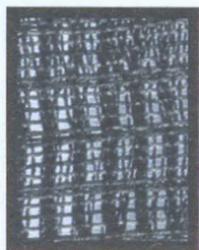
Do you remember all those missions
we used to take for free,
those many trips to the unknown,
all parts of a super--electric collage
to keep our tiny minds free from closure?
And the images would all come to us
in different ways, many a daze
showing us beauty and life,
science and nature,
like spiritual entities or mad manitous

waking from silent slumber,
aroused only for fear, food, and provocation.
With all of those flashes
we used to make our world first a playpen,
then a playground, and next
a theater of hope and tragedy,
swinging us up, over, and beyond
the spectrum of insular society.

So once again I journey through life
looking into tunnels with visions luminescent,
like candles flickering puppets upon the walls dancing
images of hostility and passion.
With eyes becoming clearer and nearer to full strength
I watch thunder falling from drooping leaves,
that energy, excitement, and light
vibrating and shaking these sweet walls around me,
sweet like a hive full of honey.

So I will mission upon this chance of fate,
this Golden Stroke of Genius
that there are angels all around you,
smiling and spying like busy bees
as to your future in the End.

And capping this potion before I go,
this life giving elixir
of faith and reassurance,
I'll leave you with my one frustration ...
If I hadn't left so soon tonight
I might never have let go.



Checkmate

b y H e a t h e r M a r i e R i p l e y

Swallow the peace
Of mountains rich
Where equality breathes
Through white man's whistle
of bloody gums
and missing teeth;

For Whitney shan't have known
A string of cotton
Clutched the future,
Embalmed the truth
of chessman's moves;

Thus when nightfall's king
Steals daybreak's morn'
Then on the peak of Rushmore
She shall sing.

20. *b y S t e v e K a s z y n s k i*

sleep is careful
when we go twisting in sheets
and shake in the dream of the man.
through the window, where
the scribed ledge hangs above the stair
and tremors of nervous breath
carry in whirring fume from the room,
turn from the dream.
and slowly reach for the most sullen of flesh,
past a bare sheet, to a cold wooden shelf.



Prisoner of Reason J. McMillan

Praying to the Penis

by Elizabeth A. Johnson-Miller

Preacher Man stares down out of heaven
the rest of us squirming in hard sweaty hell.

The Bible slaps our faces
and Preacher Man smiles at the marks it leaves behind.

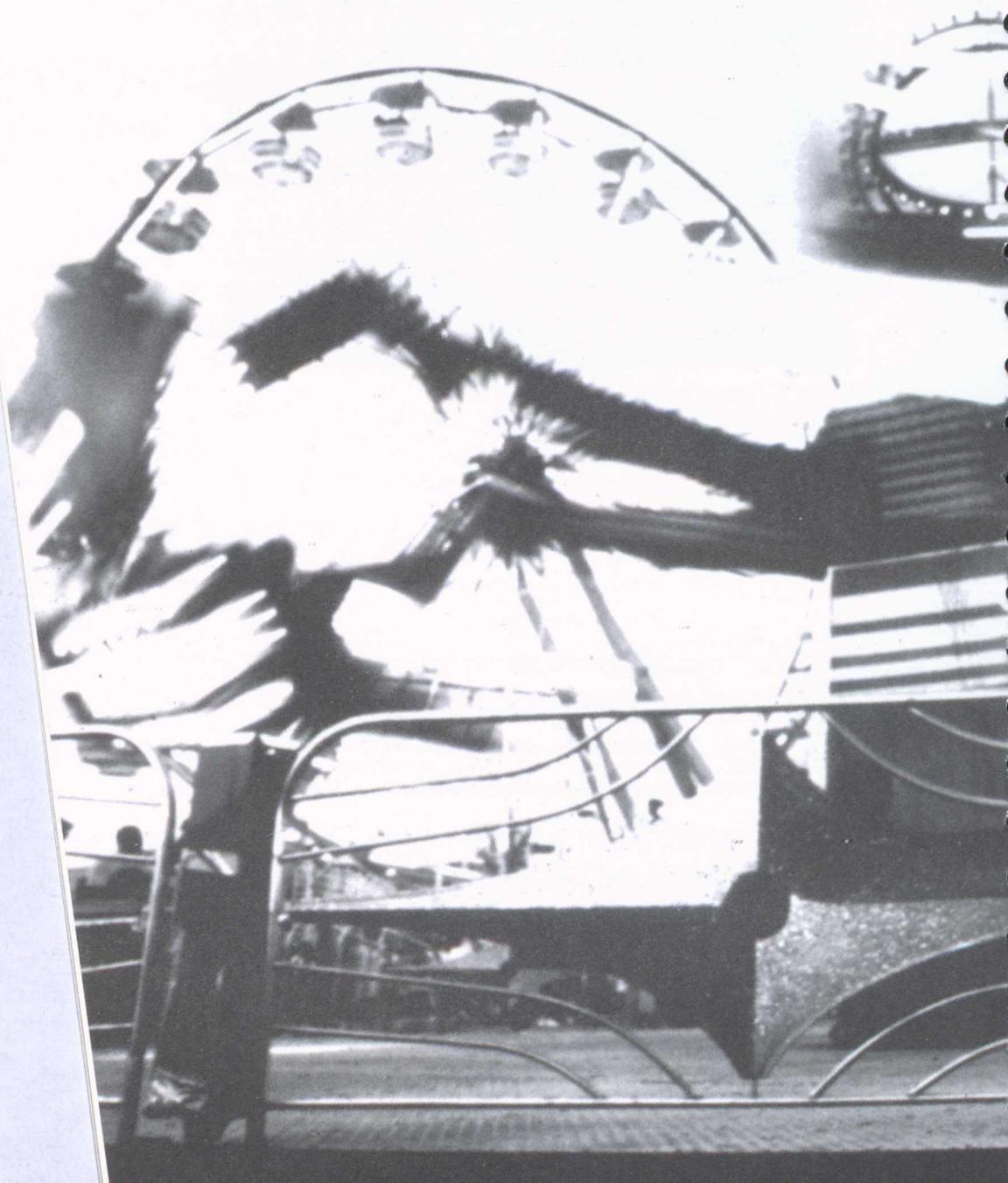
"But Preacher Man," I say, "Why does God have to be a Man, a He?"

My eyes water from

"It's in the Bible," thwack

"It's in the Bible," thwack

"It's in-



Sainte-Chapelle wraps Joseph's coat of
many colors around me warm but growing
heavy I feel like I am going to fall to my knees

Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ballets God's homosexual
dance with Adam (but I am embarrassed by the bulge in His tights)

Jesus, Son of Man, lays near his mother's
womb as the stone to the tomb
is rolling back in the Pieta for women are only good to bourn
and mourn.

Oh Preacher Man, you're wrong. It's everywhere.



Her fingers reach wanting to shape the mold

Spinning on the wheel, clay must be thin.

Particles fly while breathing burns the throat

Creating rupturing vessels. Beauty

That exists because of skillful control

Does not mess when spreading out magazines.

Sestina

Girls sit and wait flipping through magazines

Instead of helping to fight dirty mold

That collects in corners needing control.

Missed splotches leave a film that is thin

On linoleum that once had beauty,

Wearing a mask protects a damaged throat.

Conversations can often clench the throat

Because of hints written in magazines,

Words are found to impress him with beauty.

Does this encounter fit the normal mode?

Looking there seems to be a rather thin

Expulsion on a face that lost control.

Describe the situation and control

The amount of information the throat

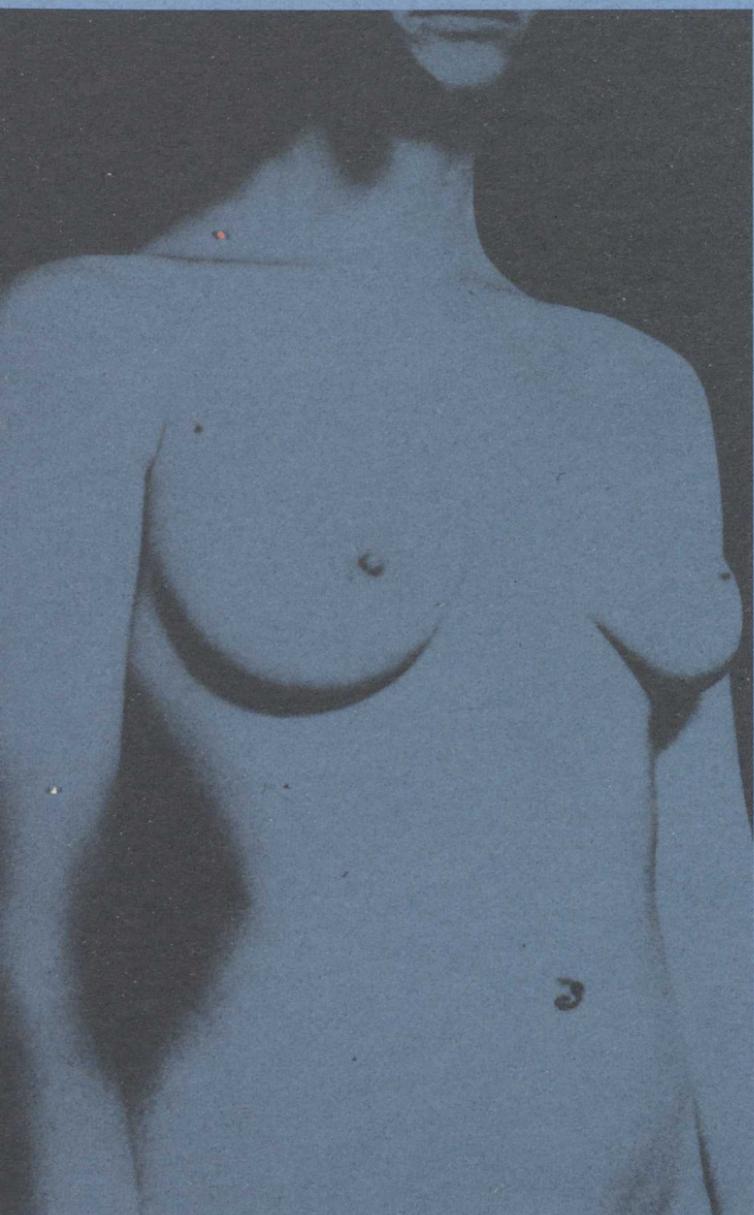
Will tend to release while dining with thin

Friends who want each detail in magazine

Format. They laugh in unison, a mold

Resembling Barbie, goddess of beauty.

b y S a r a W a l k e r



SW

Girls sit and wait flipping through magazines
Instead of helping to fight dirty mold
That collects in corners needing control.
Missed splashes leave a film that is thin
On linoleum that once had beauty,
Wearing a mask protects a damaged throat.
Conversations can often clench the throat
Because of hints written in magazines,
Words are found to impress him with beauty.
Does this encounter fit the normal mode?
Looking there seems to be a rather thin
Expulsion on a face that lost control.

Describe the situation and control
The amount of information the throat
Will tend to release while dining with thin
Friends who want each detail in magazine
Format. They laugh in unison, a mold
Resembling Barbie, goddess of beauty.

Voices

b y C h r i s C u t t e r



It is not so easy to distinguish between the voices
and the words that crawl from your lips.

A whisper and a thought
are not that different to me.

The woman below me is beating her four year old son.
I hear his cries and her screams through the floor.
Her television is louder than usual,
espousing on the irony of being unable to marry on Sunday
in the Catholic church.

Sitting here, I can devour myself until I am flat and smooth
like a sea cucumber, spewing my insides in self-defense
then nesting in cool brown sand
creating a new home and self.

Mouthing the Indian word Peoria brings me to the laboratory
where penicillin was extracted from mold,
to save the world,
like a callus from a dead man's hand.

Meanwhile, men sitting in round rooms under bare 60 watt bulbs.
(faces like crumpled paper bags)
Maybe laying on a brown spotted mattress
and exhaling free verse through tenement walls.
They chat easily with the voices.

All week long I breeze through carpeted halls,
smiling at the right people.
Voices fly like bats guided by echolocation,
bouncing off each other until they atrophy at age forty-seven.
I know why the bullet leaves the gun;
he too heard the voices.
(Like you and I)

Heard worldwide by Buddhists, optometrists, and hemorrhaging dolphins

Listen

Today the voices are not screaming at all, or whispering, instead, listing the ingredients to spaghetti sauce:

tomatoes, tomato paste, oregano, garlic, basil, ground beef, onions, mushrooms, and one or two bay leaves.

On Saturdays they collect like puddles.

Talking at the same time.

I ask them to keep quiet,

But it only works for a short time,

the noise steadily rises to its previous level.

We play games.

One may jump into my scream, posing as Larry King giving me detailed instructions.

I rarely listen. Instead, I make a sandwich or change the channel.

Later, I rearrange the chairs so things are more comfortable.

No one dislikes comfort.

Chanting,

they convince men to drag bodies through the streets.

Afterwards, we watch from my rooftop

as the trees lectured to us on the laws of thermodynamics.

(while alluding to the fact that Bohr's widely used prototype of an atom was not even believed by Bohr himself)

There is a woman throwing a red scream at a wall.

She is trapped in the background of a picture I took of my brother in San Francisco's Tenderloin District.

Apparently she has not listened closely enough; knowing only half an echo or unpaved road.

Unfortunately, for her, research is limited to lucid conversation and smoky electricity.

We are certain, though, that 90% of schizophrenics are left-handed and three out of four dentists prefer Crest.

I press my ear to the sliding glass door.

The neighbor dog is barking through the wind, which has its own soul sound.

I listen, but now I watch too.

Towards the end of the day and the beginning of the night it is impossible to draw a line where darkness begins and light recedes.

(They have told me)

So I stare at the ground for days.

Tracking the shadows and the sun.

Scrap Book

by Gwen Urbanski

Torpedo Mallet Coaster



June, 1991)

alone in our attic/apartment
you call your penthouse,
not much furniture.
cd player, black and white t.v., purple bean bag,
your kitchen table-a tv tray covered
with corroded Cheerios and plastic pasta,
your bed-a mattress lying on dusty wooden floor,
plastic night stand clustered
with cobweb crusted classics:
Thoreau, Emerson, Byron, Keats

December, 1993)

all for show.
you haven't read them, just use them.
A pick-up line for naive literature lovers
like me.
you say, "I'm a Romantic at heart."
I make angels
across the rainbow Native American weave,
not amazed that my efforts leave behind
no impression
in that attic/apartment.

August, 1991)

you sing me a song about
cherry lilacs, the sound of the August wind,
brandy alexanders and chocolate ice cream,
love.
I kiss your harmonica and swallow your breath.
we watch *White Christmas* in black and white
while sipping pink lemonade from real cantaloupes,
then dancing the mambo across the wooden floor
wearing flowered boxers and mirrored glasses.

March, 1994)

a knock at your door. you let me
in. you're roasting
colored marshmallows over the stove
using twigs from an oak tree (it's Monday).
I listen to African tribal music
from the cd player, the sound of marshmallows
fizzing on gas burner, a fire engine crying
on the next block over. I'm returning
your books
cobwebs and all.
though I don't know why,
you'd never miss us.



"The Three Stooges" *Am. F. 8. 10*

ART & SHORT STORIES

Based on Life

b y S a m a n t h a H o o v e r

I.

I'm Faith. I have a son Jason and a daughter. He's sick with cancer and I want to die. He's sitting in his room now, in his bed, reading comics, and I want him to die. I'm sick of watching him die.

He's pale and shakes. He sips from a straw and blows bubbles in his chocolate milk with his little blue lips. I dressed him tonight in his Spiderman pajamas, and I tried to thread his skinny arms into the sleeves. His arm folded up backwards, and I yanked until he squealed. My little girl said, "Take his shirt off and make him pretend he's flying," and I yanked. She is three years younger than him, thirty younger than me. Jesus, take him.

When I woke up in the morning, I brought his medicine basket to him and shook him awake. I swear that each time I see him in bed, I think he's dead, and I imagine myself ash grey and disbelieving, the doctor shining a thin light into Jason's eyes and saying, "I'm so sorry..."

I hate that hot little apartment, that little heater. Don't call me a coward. It takes a slice of me away each time I return. Jason doesn't have any friends. Do you know what it's like to be the only friend to a bald dying kid who you've thought about killing and wish would die and wrings your heart and who sits in bed all day drawing rocket ships flying away and you think Jesus what a torture that would be?

I've been pushed: I slapped him once. He spit up blood on my dress. I was going out with a man and wore my new dress that I worked holidays to buy. I gave Jason a hug good-bye, warm and tight, and he coughed like he was choking. "I'm okay, mommy," he told me and wiped his wet pink nose. I went on my date, we were strolling on the beach, and I wanted the man to kiss me, but he said, "Faith, you've something red on your back." I wore the man's coat, but I could feel the wetness on my shoulder blade, and I was never kissed.

When I got home, I screamed, "Jason!" I heard him far away. He was in the bathroom shouting, "I'm here mommy! Don't come in, I'm going to the bathroom!" When I yanked the door open, he was standing up, his underwear and pajama bottoms around his ankles, a comic book in his hand. He tried pulling his Spiderman shirt over his privates and screamed, shocked, "Mommy, I'm going bathroom!" I grabbed him and slapped red on his side, trying to get his rear end, but he twisted, flapped me with his comic book, and pulled his shirt over his knees, crying, Mommy, I'm naked! Mommy, I'm naked!"

He locks the bathroom now. I can hear him drag the hamper across the floor and shove it against the door. Then the lock clicks locked. He stays in there forever, and his little sister pokes notes under the door saying, "Come out, Jason! Everything's safe out here!" He sits on the toilet, his skinny legs dangling, reading his comics and tossing the notes crumpled into the toilet water.

At night, when I lie alone in my bedroom next to Jason's I hear the trains in the distance, haunting. I stand next to those rusted chilled tracks, on the cracking gravel at night when it is cold and damp and crickets vibrate around me, with the whistle calling. The gravel dances and shifts under my toes, the tracks shudder and shift, my body arches toward the rushing pinpoint light— If I had him with me, I'd push Jason in.

II.

His bad days are on me quickly. He is weak and limp, crying, with a sore glossy lip. I found little damp half-moons under his arms, his nails ragged and bleeding. He chews his nails, attacks them. I bite my nails now. I have wrinkles. My stomach is bulging into a roll. I used to have such nice eyes.

Jason can not move. I lay him on the floor on his blanket in a patch of sun. His face glows orange, his eyes alight like two twin blue lanterns, and he smiles. The cat pads by and licks him on the tip of his nose. We laugh. I cry. I cry.

My little girl had made him an outfit of grocery bags. It was covered with crooked red, yellow, and green crayon hearts; he even had a little hat with a slim duck feather taped to it. I ripped it. To shreds. It didn't fit him. His feet were too cramped. My little girl threw a tantrum, kicked around in a circle, chewed at the pieces of suit, spat them at me, and I still loved her. I couldn't say I loved him.



"The Pit" *John R. Brown*

I sat by the tracks today for an hour, and counted three trains: three open doors. I feel like I'm already gone, and Jason, and bone cancer, and tantrums, and little girls spitting at you, and little boys spitting on you, and blood and bills are at the back of your mind, bloodless. "Faith, you have three weeks, Faith. He's going fast, the cancer is devouring him, he'll be gone in three weeks." I have faith. I do. Gone: I have Faith.

III.

"Grandma's here!" My mother rushes in like Santa Claus, her glasses white with mist, a ripping shopping bag at her side. Her feet slowly crunch on scattered cat litter; she sees the sink buried under the dishes, and my daughter sitting half-naked in the living room watching cartoons. She is staring at me from behind her foggy glasses with a frown on her face. "You've gained weight, Faith. You're getting chubby." She sets the bag down quietly and smooths her hands on her thighs. "Where's Jason?" I nod towards his door.

"Hey, baby, look what grandma got you!" Jason is buried in blankets up to his chin. I can see his grin peeking up from underneath the covers. My mother is sitting on his legs, but Jason is too far buried to feel it. She rustles in the bag. "A baseball cap—leather!" she squeals. More rustling. Baseball cards. I think they forgot to put the gum in these," Jason is very quiet. More rustling and ripping. "Ooops. A stopwatch!" His pale white hand shoots out from underneath the covers. "Oooh, you like that, huh? Maybe you can time your mother cleaning up this sty." Jason looks at me from within his blankets, and then, embarrassed, stares at the stopwatch.

“How much longer does he have, Faith?” She pulls a turtleneck over my daughter. “Not long,” I mumble. She starts smoothing my little girl’s hair down, parting it awkwardly on the side. The child looks miserable. “How long is not too long?” Her eyes, magnified by the glasses, bug out at me. I don’t answer, but watch my daughter as she blows at her bangs. “How long is not too long?” My mother’s hands are now clasped in her lap, and she tips her head down so that her eyes float above the glasses. She blinks. “Ma, I—” Suddenly, I see him. Jason hovers in the doorway like a little white ghost, his bald head covered by the baseball cap, glowing. The stopwatch dangles from his fist.

“Come here, baby.” He shuffles up to my mother in his blue sleeper, the zipper unzipped right below his heart. He swings the stopwatch tightly. I am watching him: his eyes are pink, glossy, and trembling, his mouth pink, glossy, and trembling, his chest begins to heave. “Oh, baby, my baby.” She smooths her thighs and reaches out to him. The stopwatch snaps her in the face, and as she gasps, Jason slippers away in a whisper and soft pound.

“He should have known, Faith. You should have told him he was dying.” I should have. He should have. We should have known he was going to hear and aren’t you ashamed? Aren’t you feeling like a monster that he had to hear it this way? “He knew, mama. He just doesn’t like it.”

Now I am in his room, not sitting on his legs, and he tells me, “Mama, when you close your eyes does it look like T.V.?” I close my eyes. “Kind of.” He kneads his eyes with his fists. “Can I see when I’m dead?” He kneads. “What happens to my eyeballs when I’m dead? Are you going to give them to the doctor?” I pull his fists away from his eyes. “They’re too pretty. I’m going to give them to your sister.” This makes him frown. “What about the rest of me? Who gets my nose?”

“Your sister.”

“My mouth?”

“Me.”

“What about my feet?”

“Kitty.”

“What about my . . . butt?”

“Grandma.”

We start laughing, but I can see the tiredness and cold thumping his body, his heartbeat and warmth being drummed out. His mouth twitches and sags from the laughing. I smooth and steady his lips with my cold hand.

IV.

This is the day. It is grey and raw outside, and I wanted it to be sunny for him. I don't want him to leave. My daughter keeps placing her baby hand on his forehead, then his cheeks, but she doesn't know what she's feeling for. My mother drifts about the room, snooty and pouty. She keeps watching my daughter and tugs at the corners of Jason's blankets to keep them straight. I am holding a cool, damp dish towel to my cheek. My mind is blank and I wait for a thought. The towel feels so beautiful against me. My mother sighs and sits down beside me.

"Shouldn't he be in the hospital? Wouldn't it be easier on him?" I cover my eyes in the towel and feel the water pull the heat out. "Sweetie, go get Kitty and put him on the bed so Jason can pet him." My daughter skips past. "Faith, is the doctor coming? Are you going to wait? Where the hell is the child's fa__." The orange cat silently trots past my mother's feet. It sits and licks its paw, flicking her toes with its tail. My daughter skips and tosses Kitty on the bed. As the cat pads towards Jason's rasping breath, she begins again.

"It's not fair that this happens to you, I know, Faith."

"It's the water. The radioactivity. Have they answered your letter yet? You don't let the other one drink the water, do you? Faith, look at me." I stare at her mouth. "It's not your fault, you know that. No one can blame you, Faith. My Faith is a good mother. It's the city's fault. Jason's not the first." Her eyes round and open in seriousness. "Doesn't that lady who lives downstairs have bone cancer? Or her nephew? It doesn't matter: it's not right."

My daughter is gently patting Jason's cheeks with Kitty's paws. The cat sits with its head back, staring first at my boy, then at my girl, not understanding what it's doing. "Mommy," the girl whispers. "Jason's green."

"Jason," I whisper. "Jason." My daughter starts to whimper and my mother huffs in her seat. "Faith?" she asks, her mouth hanging open. "Jason." He is as green as bruises, and I am so afraid of him as he lies in bed, his eyes dark wet slits. I touch his face and my palm comes away wet and chill. My pinky is being pulled. Jason's fist is grabbing my finger and yanking it, frantically, furiously, as if he's trying to awaken from a dream. His eyes suddenly flap open, wide—I can see the fear, I can see it!

“Faith, for Christ’s sake, what’s happening?” My mother leans over my shoulder, heavy, so low her beads coil up on my neck, and I feel her breath in warm muggy sighs upon my cheek. I don’t know what to say because I can’t think. I see the wet on his forehead and feel it on my palm, I know his skin shouldn’t be green, but I can’t. “Has his breathing stopped?”

V.

Has his breathing stopped? Will my breathing stop heaving from me? The wind is punching my lungs because I am forcing myself into it, and I am not used to the cold because that heat for thirty-three years without a rest. I am not a coward. I am not a monster—I am a good woman, a good mother, my mother says I am not to blame.

The signal is coming down. I am out here in the cold and he is in the heater, dead. Dead? Or dying? I think I loved him, I am here now, by the tracks, waiting for the next express to grind through. I am the woman who beat her dying boy and I am the woman who left him in the arms of his grandma and sister. Yes, I loved him. But I love this more, the crackle, the chill, the cold damp vibration and shift, I love this more.

The bed was his leaving and this is mine.

*“You never gain something
that you lose something.”*

—Henry David Thoreau

Death Of A Factotum

b y C h r i s C u t t e r

Salad factory. Peeling vegetables. Small burning cuts in my hands. Onion tears. Long hours. My eyes adjusted, onions no longer made me cry; this scared me, so I quit.

Lurking in drink, long past midnight, usually straight through to light. As it grew later the bars were tougher, out of necessity. Laughing at 7AM, with beer and doughnuts, at a bar that played Glen Miller on the jukebox. Lunch box men wandered in and bought flasks to make it through the work day.

Direct mail warehouse. Clapping metal on racetracks of machinery. No talking only shouting. The boss with a prosthetic hook for an arm. He slapped you on the back with it hard. No one felt sorry for him.

Repetition. Repetition. Repetition. Wore me down. The ones who had been there a while bought their own black rubber mats to stand on. The floor was concrete and your feet are not. The older ones didn't even wear earplugs. I did. I quit after two weeks.

Not working for some time. Buying books and cigarettes instead of food. My motto was drink music and eat literature. Still money enough to live, to drink, buy gas. Sleeping a lot. A heavy feeling kept me in bed for twelve hours at a time. Out of bed at 3. Shower at 8. Drinking by 9.

Gas Station. Not the best part of town. Selling lottery tickets to those with no money. The store was robbed twice while I was working. I was not shot so the owner promoted me to better hours. Eyes on me constantly, the Plexiglass shield like a large distorted mirror. Me staring out. Them staring in. Just staring. The parking lot fetid with urine. Curb and gutter men with brown paper bag bottles accosted me as I walked to my car. I left my pity there with my final check.

I took a \$2,000 loan and went to California with a friend. The Promised Land. Started up a band. Also into photography. I sold my pictures in the Haight for beer money. Great while it lasted. Good people. Open-minded Californians, forced to give things a wide berth. I was a vegetarian. Only fruits, artichokes, LSD. Yoga too. Don't laugh. Best shape of my life.

College. Tried thinking at first. Talking. Reaching. Etcetera. Realized too late it was just better to go along. Knowledge versus grades, pick a side. Those who cheated wanted a good job later. I wanted nothing, just to learn. Humiliating. Worthless. Naive. Only learned to always carry a number two pencil.

Got tired of people trying to figure out how it worked. Mostly wanted to watch it happen. Pulled in so many directions: society, friends, self - I began to look for time alone to heal.

Locked myself in my apartment for fifteen straight days. No class. Showering sometimes. Reading and smoking. Masturbation. One day my father showed up at my door. I had no phone. I had bounced 17 checks.

Girlfriend. Quit everything bad. Cold turkey. She had a good job, spent every night and weekend with me. Structure was good. Volunteered at her church for something to do, delivered food to the needy in a gray Econoline van. Super, I thought. After a while people complained, I didn't bring enough food. (I was only the driver.)

Killing is serious, but practicing it is absurd fantasy. Learned not to make jokes though. Didn't realize they were already killing me. Pretended I was an actor with a role. My performance was so convincing that they gave me many awards.

Punched a guy. He called my buddy a nigger. The punch had been in the service sixteen years; the puncher was still green. They tried to throw me in jail. But after I told the story they only took a month's pay, plus extra duty. At the time I thought it was worth it.

College, again. This time I knew the deal. Even kept my mouth shut, even when a teacher told us Goethe's Young Werther had an unrealistic view of life. Called him a romantic. Somehow made it. At the end waved to my mom and threw my cap in the air.

Love at first sight. Still believed in the mysticism of things. Met and told her I wanted to marry her. She laughed. I didn't. Two months later we were living together. Engaged one year later. She was insane. Once we made love on the hood of her red Fiero in our apartment parking lot, in the middle of the day.

Another time in a department store behind a rack of clothes. She liked to do it where we might be caught. Two months before the wedding she met someone else. That was a sad day.

Graduation. Got a job. Not great. Set all kinds of records for hours worked because I had nothing else to do. Became a machine. Missed music and books, but substituted with the radio and trade magazines.

Dream job. Make more than anyone I know. More than my parents put together. Hours are longer. Loneliness the price for now. But no longer erratic, bipolar. Change is self-preservation. Controlled and steady, don't let emotions get in your way. Life is easy once you adapt, you don't have to feel as deeply. Adapt.

They asked me for money. (Had none.) Some of them yelled, said I was late. It got to me. Quit. My girlfriend was mad about that. We broke up.

Went to New Orleans. Felt like living in a grainy yellow snapshot. Erosion pulls everything without roots down the Mississippi Delta, including people. Mad eyes and vacant looks. Sun and sky looked different, like another country. I decided not to get a job for this reason. Stayed until cash ran dry. I had no skills.

Army. They tried to build you up by breaking you down, but I saw it coming.

Untitled

b y J u l i e S t a s k a u s k a s



Doorway of the Sail. Atom A double

A movement flickering in my peripheral vision. Perhaps it was my overworked imagination. A blurred grayness comes in to view moving like a pendulum, descending onto the marked peach landing on the colored palette. The grayness comes in full focus with legs twitching, six of them, long thin and one jointed. One leg moves searchingly and feels out the territory as the other legs rock and stretch in unison.

The spindle like twigs move forward dragging its thin desiccated body. The dark sack reminds me of a used empty vacuum cleaner bag ready to suck anything in its path. The starved insect looking for dinner is in the wrong place. The ceramic palette must feel cold as the head lowers, touching the unpenetrable surface denying him dinner. As the antennas raise, the head comes up and angles in my direction. I glance away for a second and look back; the would-be diner is gone. I pull my sleeves down and keep my peripheral vision open.

The Long County Road

b y L o r i S i n e n i

His name was Vern and he drove a 1984 hurst Oldsmobile that looked as though it had streaked in straight from hell. The blackness of the car was unfathomable—it had been wrecked and repainted before Vern acquired it and when he waxed it up in the summertime, the car took on a gleam that could blind you. The wheels had chrome rims and the white lettering on the rubber was as sharp and pristine as bat's teeth. The tires themselves were as black as roasted pigs on a spit and took off like a son-of-a-bitch when the pavement was just right.

The car itself possessed a certain kind of attraction that evoked pride and intrigue in Vern. At the same time, the Oldsmobile had a definite air of aloofness that set it apart from Vern, as he had owned the car about four years, yet he did not feel he knew the car as well as he should. There is a special bond that a man shares with his car that is unlike any other he will experience

in his life. Vern had a feeling that the Oldsmobile was just taking him for a ride, and would simply ditch him at the next party.

The car attracted women. Vern liked this. All sorts of women stopped what they were doing to watch that devil and his partner strutting arrogantly down the street with the windows rolled down and the radio on. Vern took a lot of women for rides in the Oldsmobile through the small towns and down the cornfield-lined highways that were the sum of his world.

A lot of the time, Vern felt downright jealous of the Oldsmobile because the women always noticed it before they saw him. Their round blue eyes would rake across the car's exterior noting, yet not fully understanding the attention paid to minute details that made the Oldsmobile alluring. Once their gaze settled on Vern, their blue eyes would narrow a bit and they would cease the chomping on their Wrigley's gum for just an instant as all their skepticism focused on him for a small moment before their pink little fingers hastily wrapped around the door handle and away they would ride.

Some of Vern's friends, who also drive nice cars, often refer to their car as "she's". Vern almost pukes up when he is around his friends when they talk about their rides as though they were women, or stubborn old gals. They are out of Vern's league. His car was definitely masculine. In fact, it was a bastard.

It wasn't long after that, Vern suspected that the car was fucking women. The car was laying women that Vern couldn't score with and even some women that he didn't know about. There was a Doors tape and a white sandal in the back that he didn't know how the hell got there. Sometimes, the son of a bitch looked so smug, as though he were saying to Vern, I got some and you didn't. There were times when Vern would have a woman in the car and they'd be driving down the road and all of a sudden, he would notice her blond head cocked real funny to one side as if the bastard were whispering something in her ear.

So Vern would turn up the radio super loud to drown it out and she'd look over at him like he was crazy. When that crap happened, it was all over for that woman, and Vern would have to suppress an urge to grasp a bunch of her dyed blond hair in his fist and give it a good yank.

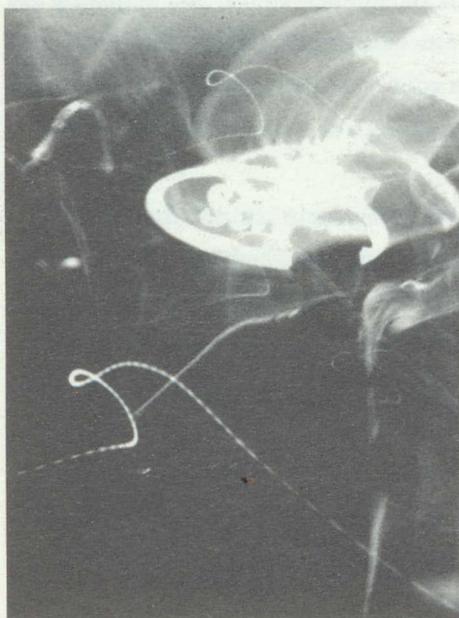
Occasionally, Vern would get a woman in the car that would go on and on about the Oldsmobile, about how much she liked it, how fast it was, how shiny and black it was, or how shitty her last boyfriend's ride was compared to this. Then, to top it all off, she'd ask to drive it. She would ask very sweetly and very prettily, saying that she just drove a boring old Buick, how she wanted to learn how to handle a hurst and lastly, she'd gush about what a nice guy Vern was as she placed her hand on his thigh. As soon as Vern noticed signs of this scenario unfolding, he would have to dump her off at the next tavern down the road.

The Oldsmobile's transmission had taken a shit earlier in the week, so Vern was good and pissed off. Secretly, Vern assumed that the car was acting up as a result of Vern laying a woman without her first riding in the Oldsmobile. He had simply gone back to her place in her white Pontiac because he was too drunk to drive.

When he went to pick the woman up the next night, the Oldsmobile seemed to stiffen and bristle like a provoked dog when she got in. The car was tormenting him for having the first crack at her, Vern's car was turning on him and that is one of the worst things that could happen to a man. So he spent all afternoon of his day off fixing the bastard and wound up staying at home and drinking beers alone all night in spite of himself. As he sat at the kitchen window, he made an oath, loud enough for the Oldsmobile to hear, that if this kind of shit happened again, he would sell that car cheap to Jake down the road who Oldsmobile was parked outside of Hill's, Vern's tavern of choice, and the red light from the flickering sign played across the hood in a greasy

puddle. Vern had been inside for hours, hammering Southern Comfort and losing miserably at pool. About twenty-eight dollars in the hole later, and a sizable bar tab to boot, Vern miraculously saw a guy come in who owed him some cash, and he made his way to the end of the bar.

Vern didn't see the girl at first—she seemed miniature compared to the environment of the tavern. It wasn't really her pale, delicate features that attracted his use, it was the way she glowed in the dinginess that surrounded her like a filthy shroud. He barely had her good



"SCRAP" Ari K. Kim

enough in focus when she leaned in towards him and asked, "Hey, can I bum a ride?" Funny, she didn't smile or anything. Before Vern could open his mouth to respond, the girl swiveled around on the bar stool and deposited her empty beer kettle on the bar. "Cool," she said. "I'll grab my bag and we'll hit it." Vern watched the girl reach beneath the bar and grab her backpack. She turned around for a moment to glance at him then she headed for the door. Vern followed blindly, her shining blond hair was like a bobbing halo moving eerily through the smoky darkness. Vern felt

the cool black metal of the door beneath his palm and marveled at how quickly they had reached the car, as he looked over his shoulder at Hill's, which now seemed very far away.

He met the gaze of the girl on the other side of the car and she was staring at him expectantly. "S'ok, right?" she asked.

"Fine. It's fine," Vern replied as he opened his door and sank into the seat. The girl jumped in and said, "Hey nice car. What's your name?"

The next thing Vern remembered was driving down the highway with the girl sitting in the seat next to him. He thought she sort of smelled like a candle and it was very quiet in the interior of the car. The girl relaxed against the smooth black seat and her small hands gathered in her lap like newly hatched sparrows. As Vern guided the Oldsmobile down the road, he

felt as though his eyeballs had rolled out his head and were balancing on the edge of the dashboard peering out. He was trying to steer the car very gently so they would not roll off the dash onto the floormat where there was a bunch of garbage.

“Hey, what road are we on?” the girl asked. Vern vaguely remembered her telling him that she was staying with her grandma who lived in a trailer park in a small town not far from the tavern, but that seemed like a long time ago and it was far behind them now. Vern tried to recall a cool line he’d picked up from a film he had once seen, but somehow it escaped him, which pissed him off, so he pressed on the gas a little harder. “Whoa,” said the girl. “This car’s got some balls. How fast does she go?” If he could, Vern would have buried her pert little nose in the dash right then and there, but he didn’t really want to loosen his grip on the wheel on the account of his damn eyeballs.

“Yeah, the bastard’s got balls,” Vern replied coldly. As he let off the gas a little, the girl

back that way for sure.” She turned her head to watch the unfamiliar scenery fly past the window and her voice sounded muffled and distant. But Vern was no longer concerned about this girl who was a painter studying to be an artist, or the trailer park, or getting her home to her grandma. She sort of whimpered and shifted in the seat, her hands timidly smoothed some stray hairs along her ears. The bastard is coming on to her, Vern thought. He really thinks he’s going to have this one for himself,

“You’re really drunk, aren’t you?” the girl asked softly. “You know, that’s cool and all, and I can respect that, but maybe. . .”

“Shut the fuck up. Just shut up” Vern was trying to be calm, but this girl and her whimpering and twisting in the seat was driving him to the extent of his patience. The hum of the engine was hypnotic and now the girl had closed her eyes and her soft blond head lay back on the seat, lost in the sway of seduction. The car was taking them both for a ride, so to appease it, Vern took his hands off the wheel and clamped them over the girl’s ears and her scream felt thick against his neck.

began to chatter about how she was studying to be an artist; how she was just a painter now and some bullshit about how a painter becomes an artist, or so he thought. This was all before a cold mocking rage started seeping through the floor of the car like polluted rainwater. It was lapping about the soles of his boots, threatening, creeping.

Vern was thinking that he should see about turning the car off the road. He had to get out. The bastard was trying to flood him out.

“But where are we going?” the girl piped up. “The trailer park must be

The distant rumbling that sounded to Vern like a stampede was actually the car hitting gravel on the side of the road. The Oldsmobile began skidding toward a patch of trees until Vern grabbed a hold of the wheel and firmly guided the car back to the pavement. Vern thought about how smooth that car was riding now that he had the different tires put on. The car roared angrily over the railroad tracks that bisected the road and Vern realized where they were. This road ran right along the river and forest preserve he used to go to when he was a kid. The park entrance was not far down the road. Suddenly calm, Vern relaxed against the seat. The car hurled down the road and soon the headlights captured the entrance to the forest preserve and the girl gripped the

side of the door as they swerved in. Her gasps echoed around the interior of the car and sounded wet and fearsome. Upon entering, the Oldsmobile managed to take down a sturdy-looking welcome sign in stride, and Vern contemplated the effectiveness of that sway bar he had installed on the back two weeks ago. His thoughts were interrupted as the girl let out a terrified wail that prompted him to smash her head against the passenger side window, where it ended up as a chipped squeak of flesh rubbing against glass. The Oldsmobile lumbered down the trail and the tires sounded sticky slamming through the muddy, leaf clogged potholes. The girl was mercifully quiet. Her head was turned away from him, as though whatever was flying past the window was much more interesting than the man sitting in the seat next to her. To Vern, she looked very small and insignificant.

The car heaved to a stop at the bank of the rain swollen river and the sound of rushing water sounded to Vern like a stadium full of applause. He jumped out of the Oldsmobile and tried to negotiate how much land was between the car and the edge of the water. He was pleased to discover that it consisted only of a strip of mud and decaying leaves lapping onto the bank like pathetic paper boats. It all made Vern feel very big. He jumped back into the Oldsmobile to shift the hurst into drive. The girl slowly turned her head to look at him with a sleepy, astonished look on her face that reminded him of the morning after sex looks he's seen before. The faint tingle in his left hand also reminded him that only a short time ago, he'd had cracked her head up against the window. A bright red smear on the glass confirmed this, and Vern nodded to himself in satisfaction.

With one fluid movement of his wrist, the hurst slid like an eager virgin into drive, just like he knew it would. A gurgling sound filled the inside of the car and Vern knew the bastard was choking on the mud. The

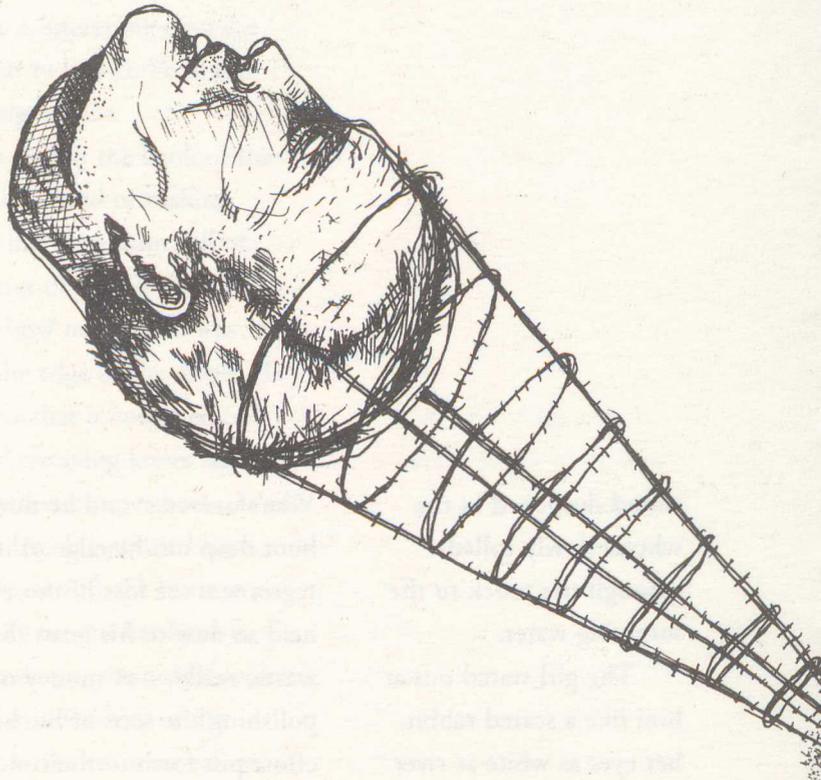
sound deepened as the wheels slowly rolled through the muck to the forgiving water.

The girl stared out at him like a scared rabbit, her eyes as white as river pebbles shining through the glass. Her small pink mouth made a delicate little “O,” but Vern could not hear if she made a sound or not, for the car was sliding easily now down the muddy embankment. The chrome rims sparkled in the black water like tiny bundles of stars streaking through the universe,

Vern’s universe, and he now found himself boot deep on the edge of it. Vern’s last regret was the loss of those chrome rims he held so dear to his heart. Seems like such a waste, really— of money of time spent polishing the sons of bitches. Of all the effort put forth to their meticulous care. The way they gleamed white hot peeling down the freshly blackened roads of June. The racing, the racing. The blackness engulfed the last sparkling glimpse of metal as the car slowly drifted out with the rather strong current of the river. The gleaming blackness of the Oldsmobile and the dark river finally merged into one giant ripple until all that was left was the faint crinkle of autumn leaves overhead signaling the end of summer.

River Development 12

by Dan Rowley



Bill and Dave had been skating together for a couple years. They were always searching, sometimes finding. Bill usually was the one to score the weed and Dave was the one to smoke it but what they were searching for, that was not. On and around to the far side of town, cross the river and back, looking for new places to skate.

They were both half-baked walking down the road one night when they came across a gravel trail opening in the forest they had never noticed before. They were thinking about taking goof-balls, and since such an occasion had presented itself, they ate up and went in. They started to ramble, slowly and uninterrupted and they found themselves upon a group of people who seemed a little shocked at their presence, maybe worried. Bill simpered, he said, "Who's there?"

"What do you want," a voice replied as Bill and Dave walked closer sensing their empowerment in catching some guilty consciences.

"What are you guys doing?" asked Dave with skateboard in hand.

"We were just headin' out to the ditch. Ever been there?"

"What ditch?" Bill simpered again. The goof-balls were beginning to make a goof-ball of him.

"There is a blah, blah, blah. . ." Bill and Dave couldn't really concentrate long enough to listen to the stranger/skater story. He had a monotone voice, deep but uninteresting. They managed to pick up the fact that these people wanted the same thing they did--to skate. Some of the new crowd seemed to be getting impatient, they wanted to keep moving. And so gradually, everybody (eight or nine plus two) began to have a common interest in passing up where they stood. Dave noticed a large old tire on the side of the wide gravel pathway, with huge white spider webs reaching from the center to the sides and then going upwards in the shape of a mushroom.

"What are you guys doing?" asked Dave.

"We are going riverward through the riverweeds," said a tall kid wearing sandals. Dave wondered how this riverweird person skated without shoes. The sandals were beige and broken, as if they had become more of a part of this person rather than an accessory. The gravel path they were walking on was becoming spread out now. More like a parking lot, as they hiked up onto an embankment that turned northward, parallel to the river instead of toward it. Rocky levy under his feet, Dave peered up at a large building. Could this possibly be a useful entryway, a valid venue for cars and pick-up trucks full of illiterate factory workers missing front teeth? This place seemed so remote and uninhabited, so run-down and abandoned Dave pondered desertion and desolation. Why had he not ever noticed this place and explored for himself?

They were all coming up on the huge building, there was a gravel parking lot but the only occupant was a white Volkswagen bug with no wheels and no windows. No engine or useful parts either they discovered, upon further investigation, and hadn't been for a long time. An abandoned chemical factory with a girl in the parking lot approaches, SWF, Bill smelled it. Bill was a horn-dog with a nose for conquering the untame bush. He saw her and suddenly the world vanished save for her. He then asked her, "Who are you?"

"I cannot tell you who I am, I am from a group that contains me and explains the whole of me, we are one body together and apart we are but fragmentations of an ideal and we call ourselves the united melancholy whole.

"You cannot see me, you are looking through me, because I am a part of, blah, blah, blah. . ." Bill turned away from her direction so as not to run into her. Walking, Dave glanced back at Bill. Dave knew she would follow due to her need to explain the inaudible truths of her meager fraction of an existence. She kept talking and walking with the group but no one gave notice because they thought that Bill, having greeted the stringy newcomer, knew her--they could not listen. Bill wanted her to be wanted but she was foreign to him and he could not look at her or pay any attention to her just yet. The fence was upon them.

The skater who had first spoken of the ditch knew how to get through the obstacle, further down along this fence lay a hole in the ground where any thin person could slip unobtrusively. There it be.

Dave was confused. He had been thinking about the sandals too long and he began to look at everyone's feet. He saw that one skater had Rollerblades on. How the hell do you skateboard in those things? Dave was gratefully snapped out of it (SNAP) by the halting of the group. River Development 12 said the door. Dave was further confused and for some reason he felt horrified at the presence of the enclosure. No one was talking now. The leader of the eight or nine spoke, "Come on."

Commander Vincent Van Gogh jumped out of a plane. The Commander had been so tormented all his early life because of his name that he had become a recluse at age sixteen and eventually joined the Army. His ability to think clear as a bell and be totally aware virtually all of the time had pushed him up the ranks in the French-Canadian army. Mission, and he had chosen to accept it, to invade deep into enemy territory unnoticed, take control of the area surrounding a chemical weapons plant and find the purpose of the installation project that Intelligence thought to be extremely dangerous. He was free, free-falling, with his men, from 10,000 feet. High above the planet letting gravity work, becoming terminal velocity. Pull that rip-cord you fearless faggot he thought to himself. They landed near a small river.

Bill and Dave could not believe the jewel that they had stumbled onto. It was a huge drainage unit, encased by greenish walls as if some nuclear waste had been dumped there. In the center a circular drain lay, about fifteen feet across and totally dry. Dave was confused, why build such a useless enormous pipe? With the river adjacent, was this a flood protection device? The skaters were already skating all over the place and so then, were Bill and Dave. Bill reflected in his air (the girl) and so skated to the edge where she was.

“Who are you?”

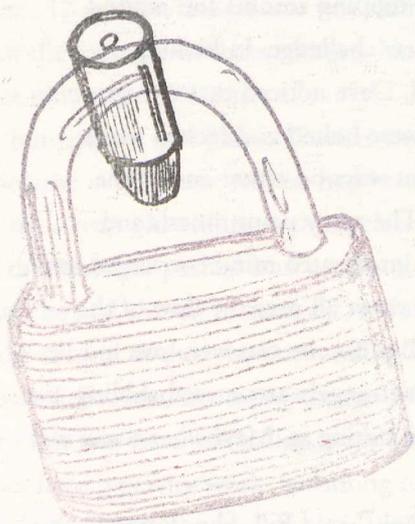
“I am a part of a group in which the leader cares not to lead out of humble humility and vices such that, blah. . .” Oh that’s right, thought Bill, she’s too weirded-out to understand conversation, but he looked. She wore a mustard color sun dress with orange and black sunflowers, she was frail and weak but that made her strong. She was beautiful, dirty but beautiful.

Dave watched the rollerblader skateboarding. He wasn’t bad for a guy wearing rollerblades. Maybe he’s one of those people that just is too good for normal circumstances and needs that extra challenge, like those skydivers with the snowboards flipping around and around for a new challenge. In looking around, Dave noticed that two green doors were bolted and locked many different ways on either end of the ditch. The spray paint murals and Dave’s intoxicated mind converged and he saw water all over the flow of the ditch. But no one was wet, save maybe for that strangely attractive babbling girl Bill was staring at. Maybe her name was Brook.

“Brook?” said Bill. She stopped babbling. “Do you have the feeling that we are sitting on a nuclear missile site covered up and forgotten about by the Reagan administration, and that a foreign army is about to invade and kill us all?”

“Although foreshadowing would say yes,” said Brook, “my feelings tell me no.”

“What do you think we should do?”



“Well we could try to be interesting but we’re ultimately trapped inside the mind of a demented writer and our future cannot deviate from this story.”

“What is with you anyway? All your talk, talk, talking about your pluralism and impending doom, what are you in all this besides T&A? You could be completely excluded from this and nothing would change.”

“Listen here you stoned monkey, what if my part is your impending doom and that information has, as of yet, been kept from you.”

“Damn, you women are so unpredictable,” Bill went back to skating full of the frustrated feeling that a girl could have a more significant role in the bigger picture.

In the mean time Dave was thinking of ways to ask the Rollerblade-skateboarder why he needed the skateboard. Then he found one, “Hey, hey you, why are you wearing rollerblades?”

“Rollerblades?” the skater looked down at his feet and immediately fell.

“Ouch, God-damnit, I didn’t realize that until you said something, thanks a lot asshole, now I can’t skate... ..Asshole!”

“Hey fuck you, at least I wear shoes,” he thought to himself, secretly jealous that he couldn’t rollerblade on a skateboard, even if Joe Rollerblade could only do it when he didn’t know he was doing it. How animated of him to fall only after realizing his peril. It’s like Bugs Bunny or better yet Wile E. Coyote falling only when they looked down or when the concept of gravity was duly explained. Or Tom the cat getting his tail cut off and handed to him, but not yelping until he saw that it was his (tail).

“Hey you,” said Brook to Dave.

“Huh?” said Dave (SNAP) getting snapped out of an old movie that was being shown directly in front of his eyes (click, click, click) like from an old movie projector. The movie was about some skateboarder kids skating around in an enclosed drainage ditch with some unforeseen thing about to happen.

“What’s your name?”

“Our name is Daves and we have a hard time listening as I am hard of hearing, especially when there are other noises in strange places and my brain is modified into a blah blah blah. . .” Brook was instantly in love. She listened to his words go by and she tried to listen but she could not. Her heart raced and he talked. She was so moved that he was plural just as she was. She would find out through the occasional word or phrase or fragment or maybe sentence, with adjectives, lots of adjectives, that he was a mere split personality and not a full fledged splinter of a soul existing sporadically, that is, taking her turn, as infrequent and unpredictable as it was. As incongruent as he was, and as little as she was actually listening, she managed to learn quite a bit of factoids about old Daves. He was quite thorough. His passion was for the harp, his mother was a professor of music at the nearby community college and a first-chair harpist in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which Brook learned was a very prestigious organization. Daves claimed that his dear young mum was too interested in achievement and prestige as a measuring cup for happiness. He, on the left hand, would not consider himself a failure if when he died he accomplished absolutely nothing but had been relatively content the duration (and maybe did no bad [on purpose]). Dave was borderline teenage idiot savant when it came to the harp. His feelings for it surpassed any other he had ever had for anything. Dave was rambling, straight from his heart (must have been the drugs). Brook began to realize, very slowly, that her fragment was learning about Dave’s mother so effortlessly because Dave’s first personality was that of his mother. She figured that his mother must have done some serious hallucinogens while she was pregnant with him. And she figured, correctly, that the maternal bond ran far deeper than hers (not that she had one) or anybody else’s. After all she was hatched -not born. Dave and his mother were twins, they were exactly the same, only completely different.

As he was going on and on Brook’s desire to (short attention span) contribute verbiage began to take control, as usual, and she began to think in run-on sentences, as if she was dreaming that she was still talking. What she was saying integrated what Dave was saying to her and her dream said,

“Wow you are really interesting but what about the other yous, like the one that drives his skateboard all around and likes to babble and smoke aimlessly?” Dave turned his head.

He fixated on a big sunflower on Brook’s dress that was perfectly circular, expanding outward from the center and happened to be covering her right breast but he didn’t notice that yet. Orange and black the sunflower spun, and jiggled and as he stared he realized what he was looking at and that she was not wearing any underwear. He then realized she might realize that he was staring at her chest, when in fact he was just spacing out in her direction, but then, in glancing at her eyes to check to see if she realized that he might be checking out her chest, he realized not only that she would never mind anyone looking at her chest, let alone give notice, but that she was guilty of the same crime

Bill was guilty of earlier - not listening. He stopped, he skated away. He skated past Bill who had managed to make amends with, and talk Joe Rollerblade into giving up the blades so Bill could have a go at it. Bill's shoes were on their way over to Joe's feet when Joe said, "Hey, you're not going to try to skateboard in those things are you?"

"No," said Bill, "I just want to try'n jump that channel over the green door yonder."

"Oh, cause, man, once you realize you've got those things on your feet, it be a bitch to skate."

"I figured as much," Bill simpered as he looked around for Dave.

Van Gogh's unit had landed, and not far from target. They touched down on the gravel entrance to the

chemical weapons factory and moved in. Private R. Oppenheimer noticed a large old tire covered in spider webs. Van Gogh moved his troops in toward the river where they were supposed to find the factory. It was there all righty. Five or six stories tall with four tall dormant smoke stacks on each end. There were walkways on each level on the outside of the building, with steel stairs, the kind you can see through if you are walking on them, and safety lights on each corner of the walkway that wound around the structure in 90 degree angles. Van Gogh was shocked at the absence of life. He figured, as they skillfully invaded that this place may not be in use as it was alleged to be. Once they were inside he knew that no one was there but he continued to proceed cautiously because the interior safety lights were gazing a dull rose glint (made him think of blood). Before long Commander Van Gogh's unit had secured the factory but had found no chemical weapons. What was this place if it wasn't a chemical weapons factory? Van Gogh's mind worked overtime, where was the threat? All he seemed to find were spider webs and empty rooms on every level. Maybe this wasn't what they had gone in for.

Dave was just fuckin' with her anyway. He just wanted to see what old Brook was about. He noticed her from the beginning. He was the only one that knew what Bill was up to, and that was, just as a toilet amplifies flatulence, get his big ego sucked. Dave didn't really give a shit about anyone. All Dave wanted was to play the old harp but he sensed it, he knew that Brook was terminally attracted to him. He knew before any meaningless words were passed, before he even got a good look at that talking person, that she would want him more than Bill. Why? The answer is simple, inevitably undeniable. Bill wanted her. She knew she had him as an option to choose only when all her other options had run out; however, Dave offered something that no one else could possibly offer—Dave was not interested. Dave was obviously consumed in something much deeper than flowergirl, he had vision, a mission. Bill wanted Brook, Dave had other things to do. This disinterest in people made Brook relate to Dave far more than Dave was capable of coping with although he couldn't have figured that out. He was too far gone.

Bill tried to skate some more but he felt a certain negative energy coming from somewhere, maybe from below. Brook was standing and staring off in no particular direction when she felt a hand on her elbow. When she turned her head to look and see the elbow situation, a warm feeling of wetness and excitement overcame her. She was looking at Dave and they walked away. They walked and walked along the meandering river in silence. A beaver plopped itself into the flow of the water and scurried away bewildered by the angst. After a minute or two of deep river anticipation they turned into woods. His hands were upon her. Their clothes were upon the ground. The two nudes stood freely; he was behind her as his hands lightly roamed her front side, a pale white thin body with a left thigh completely tattooed an Egret (*Casmeridios albus*). The bird's long beak wrapped around the front

of her and pointed straight towards its trim nest. Her arms were in the air crossed behind his head. Soon, soon on the grass and dirt she let out a prolonged, low, inarticulate sound, as her breath was shaky in intoxicated undulation. Dave was talking to the bird, he liked birds.

After laying staring at the night sky in silence for an hour or two (where does the time go?) Brook stood. He looked up at her lean profile against the brilliant stars. She wiped some black dirt and twigs off of her ass, looked at a nearby tree, tall and straight, with green leaves and branches, but now unexplainable more moving and significant. She looked down and found her new lover ready for another indulgent and salacious melee. By the time another spell had passed the two individuals found themselves appropriately covered, hair to toe, in filth. To the river!

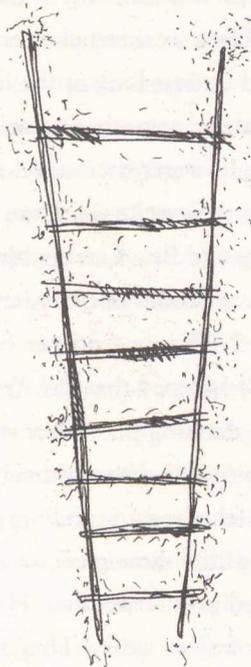
Only a few skaters had enough energy left to continue the fiasco. The rest rested. Bill sat on the lip of the ditch and pondered insignificance and some other insignificant stuff.

Here is the deal. Yeah they had a perfect relationship at the time, but perfection is so ephemeral. It is not, by any means, something that can last. Nope. Like those last few elements on the Periodic Table of the Elements, the 'man made' elements. They exist, but only for a thimbleful of nanoseconds. Brook and Dave were struck speechless. All they could do was look at the face of their respective nemesis, and touch. In the moonlit water they stood thinking that when they woke up, Dave to his Frosted Flakes and Brook to her semi-counterparts, that they could not ever have predicted such a delicious sequence of events to have happened that day. Yes, they were both thinking that. They were connected by spirit and through their connection they felt the same feelings, their hearts beat at the same rates, and their eyes locked on one another. Happiness gives way to worry. They floated with

the current leaving their clothes behind, moving slowly, feeling too much to think.

Van Gogh was thinking. Thinking about coordinates. If this factory wasn't the stronghold, then he fina betta get his white ass ova way he supposta be, and fas. He realized immediately that they must move on, but where? Van Gogh scratched his ill-shaven jaw. The answer lie anywhere but in an empty factory (to the river). Since the factory was secured Van Gogh set up posts and configured a small platoon of scouts to be sent out into the unknown. They were to be led by himself. He said, "Men, we're moving out, cover us to any enemy threat, we're going out to find any assets in the surrounding area. If we run into the enemy you will hear shots fired, do not move in after us, stay here, keep the factory secured and radio for reinforcements on channel B. IS THAT CLEAR!" Private Oppenheimer raised his hand in question, "Private!"

"Sir, if I may ask, sir, what are you expecting to find, sir?"





EFFORTS & SPECIAL THANKS

Blessings on him that first invented sleep!

—Cervantes

Faculty Advisor

Reginold Shepard

Editor-in-Chief

Jeannie Ozlanski

Fiction Editors

Diane Ashley

Betsy Miller-Johnson

Jeannie Ozlanski

Kirsten Ruby

Fiction Judges

Jyl Fehrenkamp

Megan Johnson

Ethan Lance

Carolyn Lynch

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Our parents, A.P. and his conviction, Big Dog for his cool drawings, the junior design sluts (Brendan, Rob, Liz), David Bythewoods, Art (basketball players get the most...), Marc & Chris (the bar olympiad), Sato and all his grief, Orla for dietary coercion, Jessie (the red roof inn), S.J., J.D., & Ashmann, Susan Lally and past *Towers* art directors for their inspiration, Tracy Chapman, the Eight O'Clock Beans and anyone else we probably should have included, but we're too tired to remember.

Danni Dave

Poetry Editor

Jane Madsen

Art Directors

Dawn Hancock

David Hewitt

Poetry Judges

Jane Madsen

Tanya Weiland

AN EXTRA SPECIAL THANKS TO THE PEOPLE WHO
MADE THIS TOWERS PUBLICATION POSSIBLE:

Northern Illinois University, the student artists and authors,
Denis Paluch from Graphic House, Wendy Smith from
Beckett Paper, Mike Chorvat, Dave Menard, Lawrence from
Helix, Phil Melnick from the Photo Department, George
from D.C. Lithographers, and Don Peach from ProGraphics.

I wish that all of these works could be done in light of the
talents that God has given us. However, it is for He that we
have this choice, and this freedom to pave the road upon
which we walk. This book is meant to be a frame, but not a
framework, it is an objective vessel, containing the air we
breathe, and the different lives we live. —David R. Hewitt

Printing: Case/Paluch & Associates (Graphic House Chicago)

Paper: Beckett Paper: Expression; Iceberg 80# cover, 100# text

Concept; Huckleberry 80# cover, Cashew 80# cover, Canyon 80# cover, Sand 70# text

