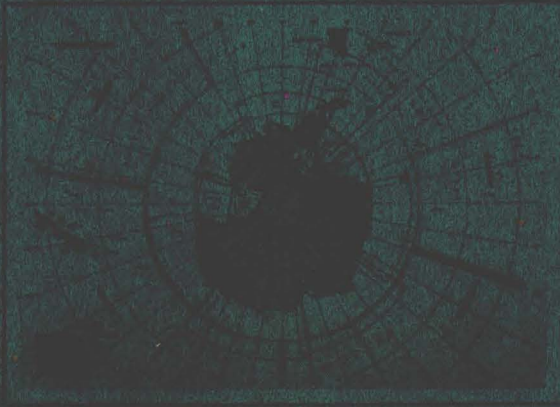


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The
Northridge
Review

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~
Beyond This Point
Lie Monsters.
~

The
Northridge
Review

Spring 1998

Awards

Two awards are given annually in recognition of the finest works published in the Spring and the Fall issues of *The Northridge Review*.

The Northridge Review Fiction Award recognizes excellence in short story writing by a CSUN student published in *The Northridge Review*.

This winner of this award for 1996-97 is Alexis Frixione for "NVWVS (Unrelated 1)," "The Unwanted Guest," and "There is a Difference of 30 Degrees Between Shade and Sunlight in the Highlands of Peru." *The Northridge Review* expresses its gratitude to Professor Katharine Haake for evaluating the fiction.

The **Rachel Sherwood Award**, given in memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes excellence in poetry writing by a CSUN student published in *The Northridge Review*.

The winner of this award for 1996-97 is Donna Marsh for "Bombay 1969." *The Northridge Review* expresses its gratitude to Professor Dorothy Barresi for evaluating the poetry.

The Northridge Review invites submissions between September and May. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the author's name, address and telephone number, as well as the titles of the works submitted. *The author's name should not appear on the manuscript itself.* Manuscripts and all other correspondence should be delivered to:

The Northridge Review
Department of English
California State University
Northridge, CA 91330-8248

Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

The Northridge Review gratefully acknowledges the Associated Students of CSUN and the English Department faculty and staff for their support in making this issue happen.

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C ontents

Driving Down Reseda	7
Rebecca Baroma	
Brown Paper Package	18
Armine Iknadossian	
Cheap Talk	20
Anja Leigh	
The Mad Girl Remembers	21
Buying Clothes for the Poet	
Who Sent Her Wine, Screamed on Roofs	
Of California Houses	
Lyn Lifshin	
An Analysis of Language Differences or	23
Dos Mujeres y una Fruta Tropicál	
Tara Kolarek	
August	30
Roxanne Duboucheron	
October in the Railroad Earth	31
Jenni Rosenhaft	
Despair	32
Daniel Mahoney	
SEX & women	34
Staci Bleecker	
Snailshellshoes	41
Alexis Frixione	
And Now I Will Disappear	44
Margo McCall	
Memories	48
Hawani Negussie	
Lemonry	49
Daniel Mahoney	
The Garden	50
Jolene Yale	
Desert Woman	59
Kitty Nard	

Christ is a Lazy Fuck Alexis Frixione	60
Warrior Daughter Kitty Nard	62
The Ocean Christopher A. Sedlmeyer	63
Descent to the Ice Goddess Desiree Wold	64
April Ate Josh Filan	82
Looking Back Lynnette Morinini	84
Steps to Montmartre Roxanne Duboucheron	85
Mandala Lynn Root	86
The Waltz Ernan Lopez	87
Work On What Has Been Spoiled Julia Allen	88
Henka Lyn Lifshin	93
untitled poem Salim Cain	94
Typewriter Mouth Rebecca Brown	95
Anlight Teacher in the Gulag John Crust	97
formodernlouters hormone	105
In Praise of Ketchup Nancy Thompson	106
Ahistorical Treatise Charles Jason Foster	107
It's a Boy Charles Jason Foster	108
Around Here j julie	110

D Driving Down Reseda

Rebecca
Baroma

You are
Driving down Reseda
On your way to school
Drinking coffee
Sleepy as fuck
Thinking about last night.

(Why couldn't you sleep?)

You were

Once

In deep sleep

Someone was scratching your head

Momma's scratching your head

Momma's changing you

Momma's feeding you

Momma's pulling your hair

You woke up

and

Lava's scratching your head

Nursing your head

Nails digging in

Looking for a nipple

Purring

like a deisel engine, a *Chevy* truck, an *El Camino*, a *Harley*

revving up

waking you up.

You pet her.

You stroke her.

She rubs up against you.

You listen to her purring

and you want to ask her

How?

You found her in the gutter
Abandoned by her momma
Who had reasons.

She has
Worms
Up her ass.

 You took her in,
 Gave her medicine

And

Worms came out.

 They are dried up somewhere
 All over the apartment.

You park the car
 (only twenty minutes today!)

You are

Hot as fuck.

But you make it on time

To your appointment

At the *Student Health Center*

To get your examination,

 The one you put off

 For the past three years

 Because you quit your job

 Three years ago

 Working at the girls' group home

 Working at the homeless shelter

 For adolescents

 For forty hours

 Trying to change some *thing*

 Because you were getting letters,

 Letters from *Modesta Village**,

 From your cousin

 Who is "constantly
 thinking of you,"

 She writes,

 In her broken

 English.

Just to get your benefits
Your rights
Your responsibilities
To work in a restaurant
To make more money
With less problems
With less rights
With less responsibilities
To work
As the *geisha* you never wanted to be.

But you don't quit
This job
Though you're working
For the third world
In this first world
Run by third world fools,
Macho fucks,
Who you love anyway
Because you were taught both ways
Because you see that fine line
Because you were touched where you weren't supposed to be
Touched
(Sometimes
You think you made it up.)
He knew but he didn't know
Really
He knew
Because it was done to him
(You think it was your fault.)
Or he saw pictures
But he didn't know he was doing it *to* you
He was doing it *for* you
Is how you have to look at it.
They were preparing you
So that you can survive
In the third world
And
Especially
In the first world.

It's been a while since you've been back
To get that *higher education*
You've always wanted
Because you keep
Getting
Those letters.

Things have changed.
Like your momma
Through the years
When she goes back
"To *La Union*,"
She says
"After I get my citizenship."

Now
You pay eleven dollars
Like in the real world.
Co-payment,
What a great system.
What a great way to go.
"It's all about education, baby."

You fill out the forms.
In between
The Sound of Music
Is on TV.
"Favorite Things"

The lady—
The lady, the one who didn't smile at you
Even though you made your appointment on time
If not early,
Smiled at you
When she asked
You
If it was too loud.

"Turn it up," you say,
And she does
As she hummed away
To go back
To sit behind her desk,
"Next!"

She makes the children play-clothes out of the drapes

(You don't actually see this.
You assume.)
You think of *Modesta Village*,
Your cousin,
And the drapes
They made
Out of old clothes.
You see the mountains.
It looks like *Mulholland, Topanga, or Laurel Canyon*
Without the valley drama
It looks like *Baguio*%,
Where your mother was taken
When *her* mother died
Without the *valley* drama.
You know what song is next.
It is plastered on the screen,
In closed caption
For the *hearing impaired*.
The hearing impaired,
The reading impaired,
The living impaired,
It is all nonsense, anyway.
Word play,
"A doe, a deer, a female deer,"
It is all so logical.
It is all so happy.

45 minutes pass.

They call your name.
The lady,
The lady, she asks you
do you need to *go*?
"No."

You walk in the examining room
And
The practitioner,
The practitioner is brushing her teeth
As you surprise her
And
She mumbles something
You tell her

(%) pronounced *bag-yo*, a city up in the high mountains

It's okay
And
That you have to go to the bathroom anyway

The practitioner,
Brushing her teeth,
A *Filipina*,
A lady of the *Philippines*,
A *Philipino* lady,
Your practitioner,
To give you a test,
So you can be examined,
Weighed,
To look at you
Inside
To see
If you can revive your ancestors,
To shame the name
With another

She

A *mare*[#] of sorts,
Will ask you
About your promiscuity,
May be
From the same town
As your parents
And so on.

You

Think of *duty*
Before
Love.

But it doesn't happen.
Not today, anyway.
Because

When you went to the bathroom
You saw
You started *spotting*.
(Your underwear is stained,
You realize,

For the rest of the day.)
It is just your luck.
But you use it as an excuse
To explain your past,
(Your past week, anyway.)

So you make another appointment
As soon as you can

Because
You don't want to put yourself through
Another week of hell,
Another three years of not knowing
What is up your promiscuous body.
And
Your left ovary is tender
But
You don't know it
Yet.

But you are relieved

Because
Now
You can prepare your little closet
By cleaning the bones,
By sucking on the marrow to take the flavor out.
Like your daddy would do
After he showed you how
To kill a chicken
By breaking the neck
Roasting it whole
Eating it
Down to the bone
Sucking the marrow to take the last drop of flavor out
In *Modesta Village*
When you were seven years old.

So you go to the *Student Union*
To see your friends
Trying to make a living
Selling *long distance service*

Then you realize
It has been a long while

Since you've been to *the Union*
Not just
Walking through or passing by
but
Chillin'. Hangin' out
In *the Union*
 In *the center*
 With the same name as your parents' hometown
 In the Philippines,
 La Union.

And you notice,
As you're *chillin'*.
Eating your *hopia*®,
All the familiar faces,
Yet
Unfamiliar
Because you never noticed them before
 (*You think of the practitioner...*)
 Because you knew
 You knew.
 You knew darn well that they didn't notice you either.
 But you knew,
 You knew that they knew that you both knew about it
all.
But that wasn't the point.
 Of being *down*.

Because you got *your own program*
 And they, *theirs*,
 With different viewers.
 It's like *cable*,
 The way it ties you up.
 Depends on how much you want to see
 How much you want to pay.
 You want to see it all, baby,
 You nasty little freak, you.

So you don't get mad.
But you sit there

And nibble
On your *sweet bean cake*,
 The one that was *special ordered*.
As you watch *their* program,
 The *familiar* faces,
 Singing,
 Dancing,
 A *revolution* of sorts,
Sitting behind a booth
Selling *long distance service*
 As *duty* and *love* echo through your brain.

You are
Relieved
Because
 Class has started.
 But
 Your professor ignores you.
 Nothing personal.
 And
 Right when you think the lecture is over
 Your professor notices you
 And gives you
 A C+
 "Because,"
 He tells you,
 "I can't see
 What you are
 Trying to
 tell me,"
 As you look down
 At your paper
 At all the red marks
 And
 Slashes
 And
 Notes.
 "You are not clear,"
 He states,
 As you look back

At how you have been *touched*,
At how you have been *sucking the marrow out of the bones*.

You
Are not sure
Of
What is real
Anymore,
Again.

You are
Relieved
Because
Class is over
But
You are
Hungry.

You are
Driving
Up Reseda
On your way home
And

You see the signs:
Imperial Dragon
Bombay Spiceland
Yoshinoya Beef Bowl
Sri Lankan Delight
Pho Ha
Thai Gourmet
Seoul Market

You are hungry,
So very,
Very hungry
That it starts to hurt
Inside.

But
You cannot
Find anything

You want
To eat.
You think
Of
Your hungry cat
In your apartment,
And the worms inside her,
 And her momma,
 And your momma,
 And your daddy,
 And your letters,
 And how you are touched,
 And how you are untouched,
 And how you are unnoticed,
 And how you are noticed,
 And your underwear,
 Your soiled underwear.

You lose your appetite.

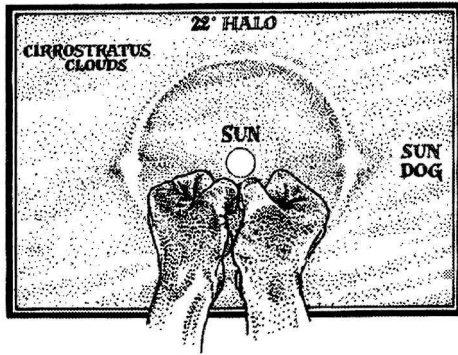
You are
Almost home
So
You can
Feed
Your cat
Some milk
With her
Medicine
To get
Medicine
To get
All the worms out
As *duty*
and
Love
Echo
Through your brain.

Brown Paper Package

Armine
Iknadossian

I turn the page and it is August once again staring me in the face and not letting go of the hand the left one that hurts like the memory of that time I fell so hard for you that my knees bruised and bled for days and lying here on my stomach I feel my blood course through my veins and shake the mattress ever so slightly and later I open my eyes to see who is sitting on the edge of my bed and there is no one there. I am alone. Closing eyes, dreaming again and waking again and trying to realize life for what it is, a superdilemma unwarranted and without a gift receipt so never to be able to return it for another newer shinier more suitable one. I don't think it is right for us to be forced to live in bodies not of our own choosing. This skin, this wrapper, this outer layer is too thick or thin or dark or pale. It is not what I expected, not what I wanted, not acceptable and I demand a reason for this mix up. I feel shiny and glossy and bright and yet the brown paper package is tied up with string and a stamp is placed on the left side, crooked and black and it reads "Delivery" and I dream of this deliverance which does not come and leaves me stranded on this mattress, heat still slapping my bare legs and sealing me to the sheets as the glue air settles onto my skin hydrated with beads of sweat trickling into my eyes, my hairline and brushing away the dead mosquito laden with a milligram of blood donorship I remain as calm as a wake and as still as a corpse and continue to stare at the wall that will remain there forever and will keep slamming me against itself as I try to pass through it by pure will but it's never really that painful really it only smarts once in a while, the muscles I mean as I lay dying wondering when the final word will be the last one uttered from the mouth forming breathing through the esophagus and suspended in mid-air for awhile it will hover over my lips, my chest and keep rising for all to hear and they will wonder why

that word was chosen to prolong its existence as a word. Not much more could be said about this state of affairs. It is unfortunate how often we ignore the real possibilities for unreal impossibilities and going nowhere is our actual destination and arriving there the real challenge. It is cruel how the giver of life does not receive death. It is not clear how we should go about this. Purely on guessing or planning a dilemma to pass the time and seize the day since there is nothing else to do but sit here and hope for the end



of time and the beginning of running out of time. Wonder why all the leaves are turning from brown to green. And it hits you. This is all a measurement of how long we can stand the winding down of our minds. The springs and coils and wheels rusting, slowing down and stopping without a clue as to why or how it all started in the first place. Grow weary and small and line up like the planets on the day of your birthday and fan the sweat and bead the brow and stick the skin leaving marks on a hot summer night during a month known for its dog days.

Cheap Talk

Anja
Leigh

"Can I buy you
a cup of coffee?"

I looked at his cigar face
and saw a boy
behind the man
and what the heck
coffee's cheap.
No investment here.
Just hanging a left
off the philosophical path
and television isn't free either.

So we took to the
back of the chairs
and bent our heads
toward our ears.

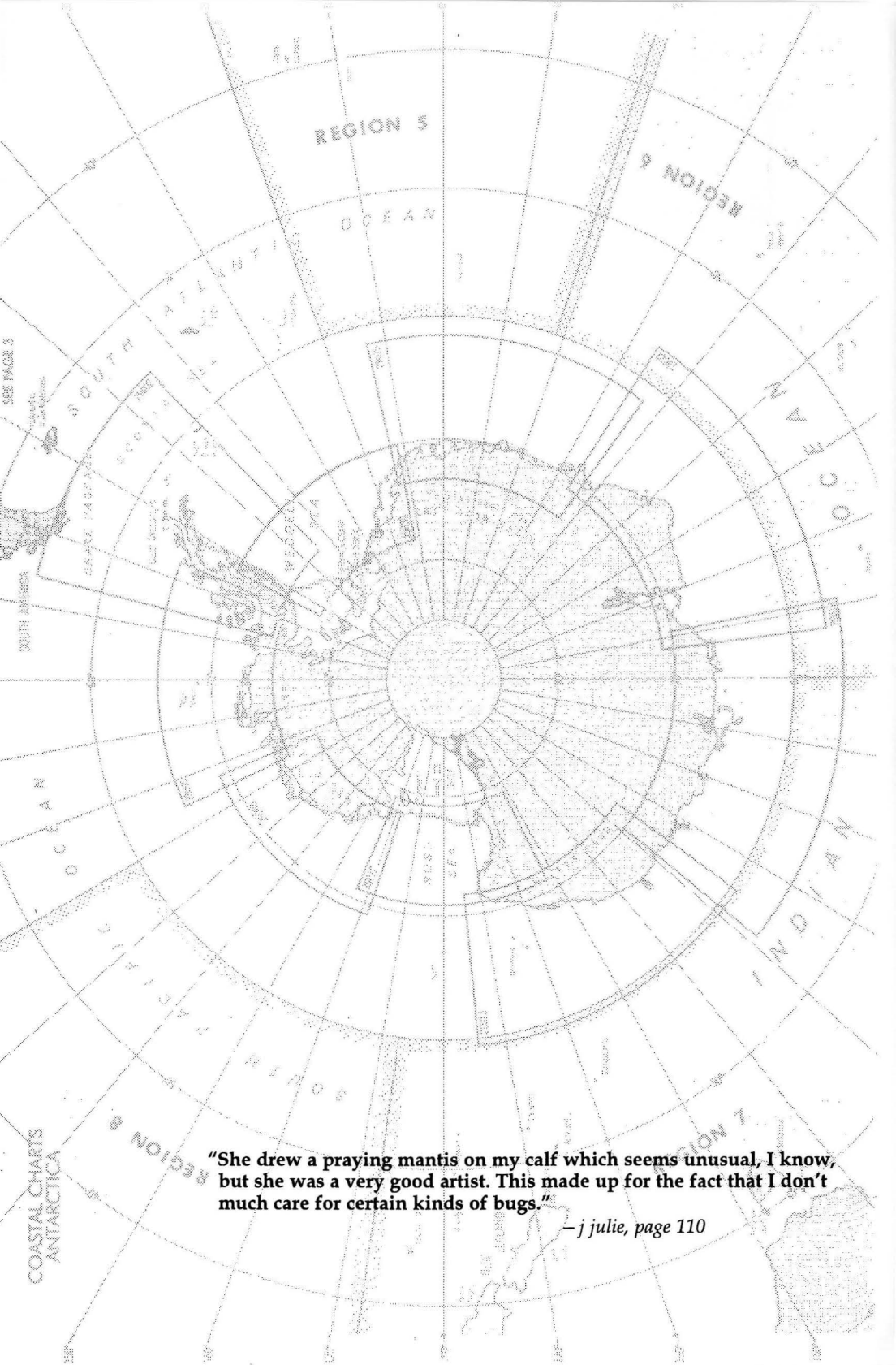


There are medleys
to be learned
from life's myths
woven through
another's eyes
'cuz what isn't true
turns up years later
anyway
and what the heck
it's a long night
until 3 a.m.
and trees dance shadows
against the frosted windows.

The Mad Girl Remembers
Buying Clothes for the Poet
Who Sent Her Wine,
Screamed on Roofs
of California Houses

Lyn
Lifshin

an ex con who said he
probably wouldn't like her
nose and that she'd chew
Chicklets lurching
with a torn suitcase
and broken shoes from
Pacific Grove wild
as bats over corn
leaves she remembers
standing on the tip
of the scale and seeing
numbers go from 120
to 107 remembers
slamming thru the Macy's
that just opened, drunk
on his verbs, the way
he called her cat
and wren and belly, promised
he would touch what no
one else had, her
hair longer, ass perfect
and tight as longing
that grew small
fingers a mouth then
froze a 9 month baby
turning to stone
inside a woman who
had pains for what
never came



"She drew a praying mantis on my calf which seems unusual, I know, but she was a very good artist. This made up for the fact that I don't much care for certain kinds of bugs."

- j julie, page 110

I had never thought the aroma of coffee desirable until this morning. It snaked its way from the kitchen, through the living room, down the hall, till it teased my nose as I watched its graceful swirling. I felt the beans must have been ground by a Columbian choreographer. I pictured her in drab factory coveralls too big for her, the pantlegs almost touching the floor, but when she walked, there were glimpses of the crimson pumps she used to dance in and she was angry that the teatro had been shelled forcing her to work for the coffee cartel, so that her one act of defiance was to grind her dancing into the beans. Later, when I told this to Jane, who worked in a laboratory, and did not trust anything that could not be proven either mathematically or scientifically, she ran down the list of, what I call the ingredients, in the coffee beans. Naturally, this was followed by a short discourse explaining that ingredients was a term used in cooking not in the laboratory, the type of discourse that usually followed when I referred to something scientific in an unscientific way. To quell the flood of science this morning as we sat in bed drinking our coffee, I began reading poetry to Jane, as I did after all her scientific discourses. I had learned early on, however, not to read any poetry to her that was not Contemporary as her only response was to give a detailed explanation of the mathematical construction of the poem. Jane had eventually resigned herself to what she called the uninhabitable island of free verse and so this morning, reading poetry, the air clears of all theorems and formulas, and the aroma of the dancing beans comes back to me.

Why Jane and I stay together amidst this constant tug-of-war between science and art is rather complex. This morning, though, I believe part of the reason is found in the coffee, which Jane served in beakers rather than cups,

because even though I am sure my beaker contains the transcendent talent of the Columbian woman and Jane sips hers thinking of the process that breaks down the molecules during brewing, ultimately, we both sit here drinking coffee.

In the beginning we had gone to a therapist who hypnotized us in an attempt to discourage Jane from constant analysis and to encourage me to be more rational. I'm not sure how it was that I convinced Jane to submit to such an unproven method but, as it turned out, on the way home from that session, Jane cited study after study disproving the effectiveness of hypnosis whereupon I sent her data drifting out of the car window on the plumes of my cigarette smoke.

Yet, as we both sit here sipping from our beakers, I do wonder about the one scientific term of Jane's that I have been able to hang onto which is entropy, which took numerous explanations on her part for me to finally understand that she was describing continuous decay, and which caused her untold grief when I told her I much preferred its adjective form, entropic, because I could change it to intropic as in the tropics and in the tropics nothing decayed. But now, like an old bone unearthed centuries later, only the noun comes to mind as I wonder if the coffee is strong enough to keep us together.

Jane had once compared our relationship to quicksilver and to demonstrate she broke the thermometer and poured the mercury onto the counter and showed me how even though it broke into small globules, it could be reinstated to a whole. She was constantly pulling these kinds of rabbits out of her scientific hat in an attempt to prove the existence of our relationship through the application of qualitative analysis. I had always felt incredibly secure with Jane until I looked up the definition of mercury and found it to be a poisonous element, and coupled with it also being the messenger god, I silently wondered whether its comparison with our relationship would be good news or bad.

Drinking my third beaker of coffee, I watch as Jane gets ready for work and see that her cheeks are flush with anticipation as she puts on her lab coat, adjusting it just so. I look at her feet and see she has on those spongy white nurse shoes and feel disappointed and somewhat silly because I had hoped to see a pair of crimson pumps. A quick air kiss now from across the room and she's gone and for once my heart does not swell like a river in danger of flooding at her leaving. Instead my mind runs through a multitude of meanderings until I find myself in Columbia looking for the choreographer.

I find her standing at the grinding machine in those big coveralls but they're cheap polyester and cling so that I can make out the curve of her hips and her bulging calves from years of dancing and wearing pumps. Behind the angry thin line of lips that part every so often into an almost smile when she had secretly added her dancing to the beans, are teeth as white as Jane's lab coat. It's quitting time and I follow her from the factory, down winding narrow roads, until we arrive at a seedy hotel where she rents a room on the third floor by the week. I wait in the bar, hoping she comes back downstairs which she does and seeing me joins me at my table and we sit, getting drunk together. Taking our bottle of tequila we stroll through the streets of Cartagena and stop at the ruins of an old church. Except for an infinitesimal crease in her brow, the anger is now gone from her face and her lips have grown full and are parting often in laughter and singing as she teaches me how to dance. Her large lips and white teeth are telling me that a beetle could learn to dance better than I could but she doesn't care if she dances with a beetle so long as she can dance. It takes a while but eventually my tight body eases so that, dancing, I'm not so much a beetle anymore but rather a clumsy labrador. Sitting again in the rubble to catch our breath she tells me the story of the madman who had blown up the church. It seems he had been the village apothecary and carried a secret grudge against the church ever since the year when Señora Montez had seen the figure

of the Virgin on her newly installed formica counter and swore that her arthritis had been cured. The news was spread by word of mouth and within a day ailing people from all over the village lined up for their formica miracle. With everyone cured the apothecary's appointment list remained bare. This sent his blood pressure as well as his anger rising but he refused the Virgin's help. Mixing the numerous chemicals and elixirs, of which he had plenty, he waited until the middle of the night, and blew up the church, which he felt was at the root of his problem. Everyone was shocked and upset at the loss of their church but when reality set in, Senora Montez was glad he had not exploded her new formica counter. As she finishes the story the sun is coming up behind us causing the beige blocks of the leveled church to glow white and her teeth even whiter and I forget about Jane's lab coat.

I am surprised that the difference in cultures doesn't cause a communication problem and wonder how it was she had learned to speak English until I realize that I am speaking Spanish. The longer I am with her the more new words I seem to know and am relieved that none of them are scientific terms. Speaking now becomes like painting from a palette of fresh, wildly varying colors. I become almost fanatical about speaking, just saying words, one right after the other. Walking back to her hotel I name everything I see, give names to things I don't know the names of, stop at newsstands and read magazines out loud, anything to just keep speaking. People stare with these funny looks on their faces but I just keep talking, talking to them and then they talk back to me and we just stand talking. The Columbian woman, whose name I did not yet even know, thought it best to take me to Señora Montez's house on the chance that the Virgin might still be visible in the formica.

By the time we get there the Virgin isn't needed as I have talked myself hoarse and find I am ravenous having only had three beakers of coffee and a bottle of Tequila the day before. Sitting in the courtyard behind the Montez

house, the Columbian woman picks a mango from a nearby tree, peels it and feeds me. As she slices she tells me that of all fruit the mango is the dearest to her because she was born under a mango tree next to the Rio Magdalena and each time she holds a mango, each time she peels a mango, she is reminded of her mother who raised her on nothing but mangos and mother's milk. Listening to her I am aware that she has not once digressed into a discourse on the life cycle of the mango, it's horticultural significance or even mentioned the word bile. There is nothing biological about her. Focusing again I find she is telling me that mangoes are an excellent treatment for bee stings although she admits she doesn't know how it works, only that it does. Hearing this freshness of faith in the unknown, it resounds in my ears like the roar of jets overhead. We stay here at La casa de Montez the rest of the day eating mangoes and talking about everything we see around us that is not the color blue, and eventually, we sleep.

Awakened by the heat of the noon sun, my hands and face sticky with the mango's juice and pulp, I notice someone has placed a pair of boots by my side and, looking over, I see that the Columbian woman also has a pair of boots by her side and they are crimson red. I've never been able to remember the literary color code of what means what and so I decide to make my own and the first entry is red which, for now, will mean dancing. Lying here thinking of colors, but coming to no conclusions, I fall back asleep.

The sun has made another revolution and mornings in Cartegena are visibly steamy as the dew and the juice and the pulp dry on my face. The Columbian woman who had risen before the steam comes out of the house wearing her crimson boots and carrying a large tray of several different mango concoctions and a pot of coffee made from beans, she says, which she ground especially for me. As we eat and drink she tells me that we will be going to visit her grandfather who still lives next to the Rio Magdalena which is not far but is a strenuous hike.

The farther we travel from Cartegena the thicker the

foliage becomes until we are deep in the jungle and the Columbian woman begins to carve a path for us with a machete. Unaccustomed to such physical activity as we begin to ascend the mountain I find it difficult to pump my legs and they are like slow moving pistons. The Columbian by contrast, with her muscular legs, moves with ease ahead of me but stops often so I can rest and grow into the comfort of my new boots. Before half the day has passed we reach the top of the mountain from where we can see down into the Valley of Mangoes. The river cuts calmly through the valley but gains momentum as it flows toward the horizon where its strength becomes incomparable.

Going down the mountain is much easier and faster and when we arrive at the base an old man with leathery, wrinkled flesh from years in the sun, greets us with strong hugs and whiskered kisses on our cheeks. It's clear he is proud of his granddaughter, the dancer, and her white teeth. As we walk to his home by the river, he tells me, as most old people do, that he has never once in his life been to a doctor or a hospital, in fact, he doesn't even know what a hospital looks like, and that his secret is the mango. This is not startling information to me as I have begun to learn, firsthand, the powers of the mango.

There is no door to his house, only a large opening that leads us directly to the kitchen which he tells me is the centerpiece of the house as it is where people and their stories mix the ingredients to feast on. There are windows on all the walls but, like the entrance to the house, never closed, rather, they are covered by thin, almost transparent, gauze-like material to filter the sun as it circles the house. The ceiling is 20 feet high and when I ask if he used cranes to put on the roof, the old man only giggles. Many years ago he tells me there was a kindly giant who lived in the valley who helped him build the house and who would pick mangoes from the hard to reach treetops. The giant, who usually slept standing up, one day was so very tired that he laid down and before he knew it had been overgrown by the jungle and was now the mountain we had crossed.

Leaving the old man to reminisce about the old days in the valley of the giant, the Columbian woman and I walk to the river. The cool water is refreshing to our tired and dirty flesh and my feet return back to their normal size. The water rushing under my armpits and between my legs echoes the peaceful silence of the valley. The old man has come from the house and we all sit on the bank of the river drinking coffee. Whatever poisons I had brought with me in my body have now been purged. Across the river is a small field of wild daisies and I challenge the Columbian woman to a swimming race across the river. Naturally she wins and waits patiently until my reckless slapping and kicking brings me to her.

As we sit amidst the daisies drying, it occurs to me, as I watch her hair form ruffles across her shoulders, to ask her name. Her name, Maria Magdalena Montoya Madera, falls delicately upon the daisies. Her body reflects the yellow and white of the petals and it unfolds to the length of her name. There is no hint of sparseness in Maria Magdalena Montoya Madera or her body.

We stay buried in the wildflowers while the sun follows its wide arc across the valley several times. Finally, returning to the other side of the river to the old man, I find waiting for me a postcard from Jane. I place it in a box made from the bark of a mango tree which is big enough to hold all the postcards I will receive from her over the next few months and when the box is full the postcards will stop.

Maria Magdalena Montoya Madera never went back to the coffee factory and she no longer has to grind her dancing into the beans. Everyday we spend long hours dancing on the bank of the river while the old man plays the guitar. This is how we live now, me, the old man, and Maria Magdalena Montoya Madera, dancing, eating mangoes and drinking coffee.*

August

Roxanne
Duboucheon

I hardly ate a thing in August,
my appetite wet for kamikazes,
vodka martinis, long island ice teas.
Smoke and red lanterns
softened the freeze frame faces of each bar
like silk screens in a black and white movie.
I eyed a lovely would-be James Dean
and ran my fingers along the soft edges
of velvet design that stood up on dark walls,
like the spiky caterpillar
daddy had rescued from the walkway,
its shiny black fur exciting and sensual
to little fingertips,
its tiny tubular legs
continually moving.

I traced the wall paper
with the embossed Chinese patterns
over and over with my index finger,
trying to read the textured script
as though it revealed something
more than the memory of the caterpillar's
prickly top, the way it looked balled up
tight like a period,
that through studying it
I might learn something of my own eager skin,
anxious feet,
and what in the world
I was recoiling from.

O

ctober in the
Railroad Earth

Jenni
Rosenhaft

I swim out of
afternoons in sun-hot meditation
dripping thoughts
of heat and loss,
singing mantras of lethargy,
lost in steam rising
from cracks in the sidewalk.
No breeze today.

In afternoon delirium
I hear the childhood bells
of phantom ice cream trucks
and the silent
centuries of day laborers
melting into street corners.

But time will soon bring October
to the railroad earth
and with it an ease
to this season's oppression
and light air
to blow life back into my thoughts.

EPILOGUE
10-24-97

This morning I saw my breath
puffs of fog
chilled crystals

D

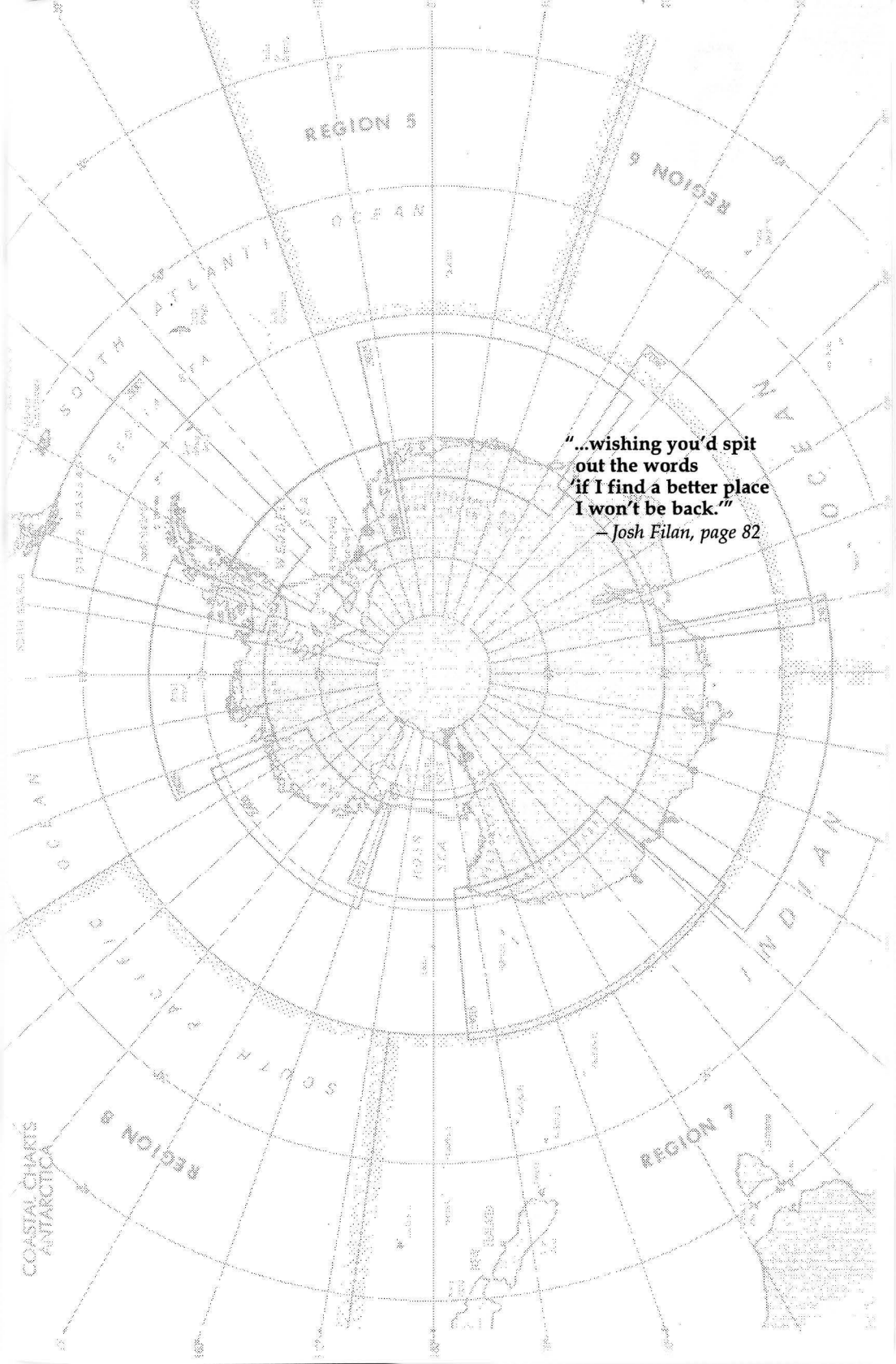
Despair

Daniel
Mahoney

your music is rooted
in the lasting wars
of boarder towns

in small boys
who turn into
small men
disappearing

in gypsy women
who trace the lines
of dead trees
and tell stories
of folk dances
soaked in vinegar
and buried
for centuries



**"...wishing you'd spit
out the words
'if I find a better place
I won't be back.'"**

- Josh Filan, page 82

SEX & women

Staci
Bleecker

sex and women and I'm thinking that
in order to get near any women to get sex I have to
think that that's exactly what I want,
and now that I'm near you I'm thinking that exactly
what I want is to tell you that your shirt is a nice color,
but that the color is unimportant,
that the shirt has a nice cut and,
no, not where did you get it,
or especially not from whom if you got it as a gift,
because what I want to know is how you chose this
shirt,
for its color or its fit,
'because it's fitting you fine'
and/or is it the feel of the material,
I like cotton, prefer 100% cotton,
"is that cotton?"

I reach over to feel,
my desire extending in a handshake
in a searching through memories to identify this moment

later,

if I need to recall it, for:

'remember the first time when I reached out to touch
your shirt?

all I really wanted was to touch you.

I thought that the shirt against your skin would have to
be soft because that was my desire,

I wanted the subtlety of a brushstroke
to lay on your skin,

wanted to brush your stomach with the tips of my
fingers,

'slowly and deliberately'

Maybe it would be dark, no, maybe slightly illuminated,
a soft blue light from somewhere, a corner maybe
and the reflection, a flashing neon from somewhere else
pulsating the textured walls, rough, dangerous, rugged
like the outdoors but indoors, and you and me, and
'I was reaching out to touch you'

in a handshake I'm tugging at the slightest fold between
my first finger and thumb sliding the fabric back and
forth on itself,

listening for the sound of your fabric and feeling for the
friction of the ribbed material sliding ribs against ribs,

"soft" is all I can say, and "it looks good on you"

But what I want you to say along with *"thanks"* is
'do you want to try it on?' and
'I like this material against my skin it makes me
feel . . . something
something about myself I look for sometimes when I
want to feel myself, sexual, sexually charging and good
about it and want something,
someone to touch me
that's why I chose to wear it tonight,
I thought maybe someone would want to reach out and
touch me.'

And I want her to offer me something,
something I won't get around to asking until later,
if later comes when I'm more comfortable,
when she's more comfortable,
when my breath is shallow and rising and
I can in my desire to have, receive, give,
say perhaps nervously 'take it off' or
maybe I just slide my fingers underneath her hem
and slide the tips upward lifting her shirt over and
above her upwardly stretched torso unveiling my

fantasy,

no, not so quickly.

Okay, okay, maybe I just slide my fingers underneath

her hem, over her breasts, softened brown nipples,

yeah,

sliding up the curve of her shoulders, past her mussed

hair,

and our damped palms touch inside the stretched out

sleeves and our fingertips,

something like electricity, yeah

and I press myself against her soft soft skin

shadows and highlights define her shape

even in darkness

and all the while never faltering, no movement without

purpose

and I'm swaying her, slowly removing her ribbed shirt

and capturing her in the small of her back landing us

upon a pillowy bed,

smooth and cleanly in a single motion sliding on top

closing in,

nose and lips hovering, nearly touching,

savoring the moment in hesitation,

brushing slightly

brushing over lips and cheeks against cheeks

and I want to kiss her and
I know she wants to kiss me and
denying both of us for moments,
And I'm reeling with anticipation, driven to
obscene levels of restraint. . .

But I can't at this point we hardly know each others'
names,

and the lighting is public and the noise is crowded

"nice color, what is that, mustard?"

"yeah, maybe or maize I think it said on the tag.

Maize, mustard, they're both edible"

and I thought I'd like to smear maize on her stomach

the stuff used to make corn tortillas

corn crushed by stones and heated in the cracking and
grinding,

friction and moistened with water and hand-mixed,

fingers plunging and squeezing crushed dried corn meal
soaking it up

and grabbed in fistfuls and squished out between the

fingers and scooped in palm size balls rolled around and

around into a tight ball sticky and attracted to itself in

the rolling and then patted flat in a circle/ish shape and

maybe rolled under wood to flatten further and thrown

on to a hot grill sizzling and browning, crisping.

But the maize I want is the sticky masa before it's rolled,
just before it's ready for rolling, while its still gritty and at its stickiest.

I'd drive my fingers, hands into the mess scooping up handfuls and smearing it across your bare shoulders, smearing it across your back rubbing it in circles, into spirals, scratching welt designs and you guessing the patterns and me smearing down your arms and reaching around and across your chest and breasts and up your neck and into your hair and wrapping my arms around you rubbing the masa with my bare torso, my nipples, matted hair and swollen lips grinding up and down against your back and the moisture from our bodies making the mix stickier still and heating up under the friction. . .

and what if the tag had said mustard?

Mustard—a lubricant dripped out of a cheap French's plastic squeeze picnic bottle,
in lines and squiggles, draw your stick figure on your

limbs, legs,
circles for knee caps and shins, feet and toes,
dots on the ends of your toes,
and your shoulders maybe
and arms, hands and fingers, like sticks too,
and your breasts,
oh the mustard cold straight out of the refrigerator and
I'd draw yellow acid lines from the dimple of your neck
down to your belly button and return, yes I'd return to
make vinegar circles for your breasts,
a 'V' for your hips,
and then with the bottle splattering and spitting the last
squirt I'd throw it aside and
begin smearing the yellow against your skin, finger
painting you,
simple at first,
then into a deep massage body tattoo,
my hands full of yellow and you,
my hands between your legs pulling apart your knees. . .

what would she say if I'd said canary?

Snailshellshoes

Alexis
Frixione

The birds still swing down to the middle of the street to the same spot where the swimming hole used to be. A memory that has diffused through 4 generations of song birds, so instinctively like acrobatic planes they dive to the center of the street and then pirouette back up to their trees and buildings to groom the microscopic insects off their beaks with dry wings.

As the old men would pass by the empty hole on their late afternoon walks they would curse. Before that first summer storm everyone thought the empty hole was worthless.

A great meteor had dropped there, either a meteor or a small red airplane. It made the biggest pothole in the world, right in the middle of the street, between Corrientes and San Martin. It forced the block to be closed off to traffic until the city, many years later, got around to repairing it.

I think a monster lived there at first, before the water. At night it would come out to take walks, trying to cool itself off under the cold summer stars. The older kids swore they felt its snores vibrate the pavement on their way to school every morning. Everyone left it alone (the hole, not the monster) until one sunbothered day, the night sky came with hot clouds that showered the dust off the streets. It rained two days and two nights straight and when the sun was back, the streets and smog were swept, the hole was full of water and the monster was already traveling far away on some dusty road.

Like a magnet, the swimming hole attracted humans. Children learned to swim left and right like never before because there was no shallow end. They even appointed Adalberto (the kid that worked at the pizza place) as the official lifeguard of the hole, but instead of a whistle he used his high school trumpet to issue his authority. The children swam for many hours in the early day and their parents laid around on towels or chairs, reading or catching

the sun.

Near nap time, when the sun had drained the energy out of all the older people of the neighborhood, they sent the children to fish at the hole. Both they and the children knew there were no fish in the hole, but the children still sat around the brim as quiet as mice with an incredible surge of patience that kept them quiet so as not to disturb the fish. One hundred kids accidentally clicking their sticks together trying to hold them still. The shade of the buildings by that time of the day hid the kids from the sun. The parents lay in their beds with their windows open, and like fish they were lulled to sleep by the quiet noise of sticks quietly clicking.

Thirsty birds would fly to the hole to bathe and drink. Thirsty neighborhood cats and dogs that traveled in packs afraid of children came out of the alleys at night to drink and rest while the neighborhood went into their apartments for dinner. The quiet street and the hole slept in the company of lazy animals under a sunset wind that smelled like autumn. After dinner, everyone went for one last nightswim and as a consequence, they began to notice the stars of the sky again. They reinvented constellations and astronomy and some made telescopes. They sat out by the swimming hole, wiping the filth off the sky with their sweaters, searching the sky for the late summer planets. They began to understand the cruelty of light pollution and would turn off all their lights and kept their heads turned, pretending to be preoccupied in some deep conversation about galaxies and nebulas, while the children played with slingshots under the street lamps. When all the lights on the block had been accidentally shot out, and night had cast itself over the swimming hole and the attentive neighborhood population, the stars would shine as bright as they do in the middle of the ocean.

Nobody remembered the first day of school that year and they were all at the swimming hole when the bell rang. Everyone rushed away in panic, grabbing books and pencils.

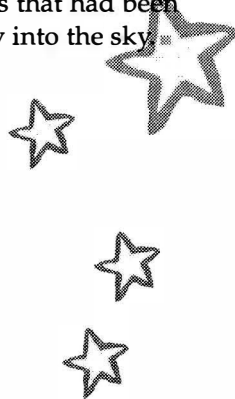
The monster had been gone a long time now. Old men and women with no jobs watered their plants and stared out their windows at the lonely water hole that was left for

the animals to enjoy.

The hole eventually froze the day just before winter vacation. The next day the children had on homemade ice skates and small saws to cut holes in the fishing water. By the end of the winter there were so many holes that children were ice skating right into the freezing water all the time and Adalberto still in red shorts and a ridiculous trumpet would dive in after them to pull out their small bodies that were anchored by waterlogged skates.

The following year, the year nobody voted except the people involved in their campaigns, Alfonsín was elected mayor of the city. His only contribution, which he actualized even before his term had begun, was to fix every street in the city so as to assure his victory.

Fifty autumns later, i still walk by the covered hole and watch the birds dive-bomb their ancestral memory. Now my back muscles have turned into wood, and i remember how me and my friends enjoyed that year. i look at the leafless trees that stand in a row down the sidewalk the same way i looked at that empty hole the first day. Autumn and the wind have already swallowed the leaves of every tree, but today, the very last one, the one on the corner before Corrientes is full of every possible color, round like a cloud of reds, blues, greens and golds. i walk faster and when i am almost beneath it, it explodes into a million frightened fragments. Butterflies that had been resting on a very vacant tree blow away into the sky.



A nd Now I Will Disappear

Margo
McCall

Sitting in the Circle

This man with the wild hair, every morning he sits in the plaza staring into something, staring into space. His hair, it is his hair I see, a black contagion of curls and knots and wild thunder tumbling around his head. The inside of his mind may look like this, a maze of dark contradiction and haphazard disengagement. But I think not, for after the hair I notice something else, the distance, the concentration congealing around him like a halo. Even at the beginning, I know he is going to disappear.

The man with the wild hair is not like the man with the newspaper and cigarettes, who also sits in the plaza every morning. The man with the wild hair is not like the man with the sombrero and orange shirt and black rubber boots, who sweeps and rakes and gathers dead blooms in his plastic wheelbarrow with workman's pride.

No, the man with the wild hair is going somewhere, sinking into the worn bricks of Olvera Street, the place the pobladores made for themselves out of sand and sweat and straw. He is silent and within himself, the cable that connects him to this world frayed with tension. Junipero Serra and King Juan Carlos beckon him. He will go. He will go.

His expression is fixed. He is like the bronze statues. Covering him every day are the same clothes; dirt of centuries ground into twill pants that are an indeterminable shade of grey, a dark blue jacket that gathers around his considerable bulk, dusty brown boots. His clothes could be from any time. They say he was a farm worker. He is big, maybe muscular under the baggy clothes, too big for an Incan or Aztec. No, he is mestizo, the strains of pounding drums and silver-clad vaqueros battling for dominance in his inner vessels. His body is used to work, tilling and planting and picking. He gathers its forces.

El Pueblo

It took the forty-four pobladores seven months to travel the one thousand miles north from Sonora to reach the eastern banks of the Porciuncula River. Chosen for their hardiness and ability to work the soil, this group of eleven families were of Spanish, Indian, and African ancestry. They carried smallpox, and were given a military escort. Most of the women were named Maria. Gov. Felipe de Neve christened this place El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles on Sept. 4, 1781.

Yang-na Indians watched from the dry hills as the newcomers moved into the place by the river. The men wore no clothes. The women wore willow bark skirts. The tribe began helping the settlers grow corn. Their village was on the site of the present day City Hall.

Today, babies are still baptized on Sundays at the old plaza church. Mariachi music blares from speakers. The smell of grilling beef and tortillas hangs in the air. Couples stop at Velarde Fruit to buy watermelon in plastic cups. They kiss the sugar from each others' lips. In this way, the continuation of tradition is assured.

But the bathrooms reek of pine cleaner. And the Aztec dancers wear pink and lime green feathers, and perform only for five minutes before stopping to pass the hat. It is no wonder the man with the wild hair does not want to be here.

Downtown Office Worker

Here I am. I have not performed my disappearing act yet.

Every day I walk through the plaza on my way to work. I am not like the man with the wild hair or the man with the newspaper and cigarettes. I am maybe a little like the man with the sombrero, who nods at me as I rush by, my skirts swishing with the wind I create.

Every morning I vanish into a tall building with thousands of other people. I sit at a computer and stare into something, stare into spaces between words. My expression is fixed. If not the same clothes, I wear the same type of clothes. Summer, it is skirt, t-shirt and long vest. Winter, it is skirt and long sweater. Sometimes I wear suits. I sit for

eight hours, then I leave.

Every afternoon I disappear into Union Station along with hundreds of other people. I sit on the train and stare into a book, more spaces between words. My expression is fixed. Sometimes I fall asleep and dream. I sit for forty-two minutes, and get off when my station is called.

I have little to do with the man with the wild hair. So why do I think about him so much?

Passing of El Pueblo

By 1870, killings and general rowdiness in the place called Sonoratown caused city growth to shift southward from the plaza. Don Vicente Lugo, famous for his horsemanship and ownership of the sprawling Rancho San Antonio, joined fellow pobladores in the Campo Santa cemetery at the end of Eternity Street.

They turned from people to streets. Don Francisco Sepulveda. Augustin Olvera. Julian Chavez. Maria Ygnacia Alvarado. Jose Vincente Feliz. From living to dead. The stagecoaches that took passengers from Pico House to Mission San Gabriel stopped coming. The city grew. Time went on. People forgot.

There are pictures in history books that show the same hills that are now covered with houses, the same fields of waving grass that became freeways. There are plenty of pictures of the plaza and Pico House and the Avila adobe. The man with the wild hair is not in any of them.

Gone

The thing I feared most has come to pass. I walk through the plaza and the man with the wild hair is gone. Perhaps I have just missed him, I think. But the next morning he is still gone. His absence is more palpable than his presence. His hair is wilder, the expression on his face more intense. He is not sitting in one place on the worn brick, but everywhere, looking out the window of Pico House, ringing the bell in the old church. I imagine he's done it, gone back to become a vaquero, riding a horse the king brought directly from Spain, sitting on a saddle dripping in white silver.

I imagine such a thing is possible, in a place ringed with history, a place where the past and present merge.

I have no interest in his replacement, a mean-faced man with grey dreadlocks. His replacement demands money and screams at the sky. I don't like him one bit.

Take One

There is a movie being shot in the plaza now. In Pico House, home of California Gov. Pio Pico. The building is made of smooth imported stone, with elegant Colonial arches, a monument to a man who loved women, gambling and drink. Right beside it, someone has constructed a miniature adobe from cardboard and paint. Someone has put up a sign that says First Federal Bank, and attached a fake ATM machine to the wall. The movie is a cheap one. It is easy to tell what's not real. Also, instead of the vast tables with sausages and eggs, ten kinds of cereal, rivers of coffee and juice, this movie crew gets only a small catering truck containing a woman who serves weak coffee in Styrofoam cups. Burly guys in wool bomber jackets that say C.A.S.T. security watch over the cables they have taped to the streets. Two cops in black knee-high boots trade stories.

There are movies being shot almost every day. Los Angeles City Hall is a popular spot, near the fountain the homeless use as a bathtub. Police cars emblazoned with Springdale Police Department are parked beside ones emblazoned with L.A.P.D. Union Station is popular too. Once the place was crawling with men in fedoras and 1940s suits. Their vintage black roadster was parked outside. Another time, a cop-and-robber scene was being filmed. The actors pulling luggage on little wheels looked more real than the befuddled real travelers trying to get to their trains. In the midst of it all, an actress pulled a gun and chased a bad guy until her sunglasses fell off and broke.

It's getting harder to tell what's real and what's not.®

M emories

Hawani
Negussie

I must have been five
or one
but I know 23.

I must have been three
when the fences of the house couldn't hold me.
Like a leaf who lost ways
in her branch,
I grew thin
but sunny.

I must have been nine,
when I collapsed in affairs of others
loyalty was the year made by the sweetest of
friends.

I must have been six
rainbowed Ethiopians clouded my cheeks
promising the lateness in my beauty
their whispers never outgrew me.

I must have been eleven or twelve
no, not thirteen, I was still there
when sands of revolution
poured in the outskirts of Nile

I wasn't ready for war...

I must have been zero
when Ma searched her belly for me
it took months before she found me.

Lemonry

Daniel
Mahoney

there are loves that go no deeper
than ashes through a metal rake,
loves that bear each days toil
only to make it home with a mouthful of kisses.
because that's all that remains.

I called you at work and forgot to speak,
my skull these days full of nothing
but a swarm of wayward bees
and a single Magi dressed splendidly in
lemon peels and jasmine.

nowhere to go--nothing to say--
the heart, afraid of choking on a bee's wing,
keeps silent, while the body awkwardly leaps
into the sea spume and flames
that color between falling curves of light.

below the twin moons of your breasts--
your belly a rising wave of poppies--
you told me that I had broken your heart
I admitted nothing; that night my jawbone
kept an ancient promise made to the tip of your sex.

in this time, twice blessed beyond good and evil,
we, dear love, can only sing of
a paradise of lemonry, sand between
bedsheets, and long suffering looks
of widowers leaving trains.

you say your heart is in half, is in quarters,
in eighths, sixteenths, thirty-seconds--
within your fragrant body (moon and
jasmine), within your fragrant body
you birth yourself and you die
within your fragrant body the footsteps
of the sea are resounding.

The Garden

Jolene
Yale

The fire flies were out early this evening. They flickered in and around the shrubbery and trees that enclosed Cora Bea Cox's dogtrot house. The house was a family heirloom from the 1870's and had never been modernized. It sat isolated on a broad, level field in Lincoln, Arkansas and was constructed of dark, squared logs that shut in two separate one-room buildings that sat side by side and were connected by a wide, covered hall. Occasionally Cora Bea drove her 66' Ford pick-up to Fayetteville to purchase apple seeds, prayer beads, alfalfa molasses, a recipe book titled, *The Mystical Universe*, but otherwise, she never left her fifty-two acre farm. Only she, a hound, and some cattle lived on the property.

An angel or a demon must have dumped the skinny hound on the side of the road because several years ago it just wandered up to Cora Bea's doorway. She tried to scare it away by shooing it with a broom, but the dog just sat there begging for something which Cora Bea did not understand nor cared to understand. So she let the hound pursue its intended mission never giving it any sort of acknowledgment. As each monotonous day on the farm seeped into the next, this ominous beast nagged behind her, nipping at her heels.

In the orchard, west of the dogtrot house, the setting sun infiltrated a tree trunk, forcing a viridescence glow to shoot out the branches and surround an apple. Cora Bea picked the apple and placed it in her tote bag. She looked across the field to the pasture where the cattle were grazing. The old, wooden fence that was built more than half a century ago for the purpose of enclosing the cattle had cracked, rotted, and decomposed in several spots, yet the cattle remained. Earlier today, the white cow had given birth to a spirited, little heifer which meant fresh milk for Cora Bea's breakfast tomorrow.

This past winter had poured out the most rain in forty

years, bestowing Cora Bea with the healthiest garden she had ever seen. As soon as the rains subsided, the vegetables sprung from the earth early in spring, and matured with almost tropical rapidity.

Cora Bea was in the garden picking the most vibrant vegetables for tonight's dinner. She was in her mid sixties, yet her hair had not grayed and was as bright and shiny red as the plump tomatoes she had just placed in the tote bag over her shoulder. As always, her hair was pinned up in a simple, tight bun. However, because tonight was special, she pulled the sharp pin from the red knot and her hair fell down her stout back in wispy curls.

Usually her hands lingered over the vegetables lazily as if lost in the gap that separates dreams from consciousness. This evening, however, her hands seemed to dance with everything she touched. "Hallo Mr. Onion," she said. The hound jerked his head up in confusion as if he had never heard her speak. She threw the onion in the air and yelled, "Weeeeeee." The dog hunched his back and barked at the woman. Amused by his response, Cora Bea reached down to pet him. He wagged his tail, jumped gaily into the air, and ran out of the garden.

Cora Bea gathered up the rest of her vegetable selections and skipped like a child out of the garden. She locked its gate, and hid the key under a heavy sandstone.

The vegetable garden, with the flower garden to its right, was facing the dogtrot house centered between the pasture and the apple orchard. The flower garden was not fenced, and consisted of various kinds of flowers. The colors were magnificent, ranging from Yellow Fringed and Purple Fringeless orchids and Yoncopins (of the Chinese lotus family) to American bell flowers and passion flowers. All the flowers grew into one big conglomerate with no set pattern — mixing and twining together — creating new inbreeds — mothers and fathers, sisters and daughters. If you stared at the flower garden long enough the colors seemed to bleed into one, giving birth to the chaotic illusion of hope or freedom. Cora Bea had not been in the garden or even taken a look at it since the day she planted the seeds, forty years ago. Whenever passing by the flower garden, she looked the other way — It was enough to know it was there.

Near the breezeway a well dug deep through soil, through clay, through marl, and hit bottom at calcareous muds. Cora Bea reeled the tin bucket down the well shaft bringing up Arkansas' freshest water. As she carried the bucket and bag of vegetables into her house, the night air weighed on the kitchen windows chanting terrors of past folklores. Thus, being superstitious and believing that fire would keep night's demons out, Cora Bea ritualistically lit candles around the room. Because tonight was special, she lit thirteen extra candles giving the room an almost fairy tale like twinkle.

The walls were papered with a depiction of a plantation setting with an ante bellum mansion in the foreground and slaves cultivating the cotton fields in the background. Cora Bea pulled off the old brown table cloth, then replaced it with a delicate white eyelet cloth, loomed down from generations past, that draped above the flat seats of four straight back chairs. She proceeded to set the table for four with her best china — delicate white dinner plates, salad plates, tea cups and saucers all hand painted with intricate, little Civil War battle settings. All the while, a wrought iron wood burning oven was cooking against the wall scenting the room with the sweet smell of corned beef and cabbage.

Cora Bea diced the carrots, garlic, and onion — added them to the black-eyed peas simmering on the stove. With astonishing vigor, she scrubbed the four sweet potatoes so clean the skins practically washed off and placed them with some chestnuts on a rack in the oven. She proceeded to cut the okra in perfect little round wheels and fried them up in a pan with some sugary lard, salts and peppers. She sliced the green apple all uniform-like and fried it up too, but with lots of brown sugar so it would caramelize. She peeled and boiled four fresh cobs of corn and chopped up a crisp, green salad topped with diced red tomatoes and a squirt of yellow lemon. Thus far she had produced all the colors of a rainbow and all the while whistling the best known fiddle tune, "The Arkansaw Traveler."

Cora Bea went into the bedroom, removed a rusted key that was hanging from a chain around her neck, and unlocked the old, mahogany hope chest which had not

been touched for forty years. The top flew open and back against the bed posts. Taking a deep breath as if to control her emotions, she picked up the dress on top. She proceeded to pull off her apron and work clothes and stepped into the long, black, satin dress. The satin caressed its way up her white, stout thighs, over her rounded seat, rested on her curved hips, and slipped over her fleshy arms. Cora Bea stood as if in a trance and gazed at her reflection in the window as a mental transformation began to develop deep within her psyche. The zipper on the back would zip only half way, so she put on a little red fringed cape that laid open in the front so as to cover her back. Reaching deeper into the chest, she retrieved a pair of pointed toe, red slip on shoes — They fit perfectly like dainty gloves. Her fingers pulled through her fiery hair as curls ignited out and full as life. The chest laid open.

The kitchen sprang with scents of a well cooked garden. Cora Cox, like a good witch, slithered out of the dogtrot house, lighting a path of white candles to guide the guests to the party inside. In anticipation, she served the meal onto the plates. She brewed the tea and stirred the carameled apples. Without thought Cora Cox opened the bottle of red wine that had been inherited with the house—and she drank from it. It was rich. It was free. It was good.

Tonight marked the fortieth year of Cora Bea's abstinence from human emotions. Just as Cora Bea had not acknowledged the hound, so had she denied herself. Every night, for forty years Cora Bea had read from the book of Genesis. She had locked herself into her ark, hoping that the evils of her soul would be washed away. Initially, she had locked herself up for forty days and forty nights, but the boat cracked on the thirty ninth day when a tear had escaped from her eye. On the fortieth day nothing had changed, so she rebuilt her ark, only stronger this time—impenetrable. Forty years had passed and tonight was the night for miracles.

It is odd how time passes at the same predictable speed. Time is dependable. Time is present. Time is past. Cora Bea never needed to buy Time a clock— Time doesn't need a tick to remind itself to endure— It simply endures. Time doesn't stagnate in 1946. Time does not need Time to

heal. Time is Time and self-sufficient as Time. Time is Cora Bea's best friend, her savior, her idol.

Be it so, the candles burned out and Cora Bea lit the lanterns and placed them through out the old dogtrot house. The food was cold and the caramel dripped off the apples while the air rotted like old, burnt wood. And, enveloped with despair, so Cora Bea laid her head on the table next to her food as it waited for her like an incubus.

The table was set. The food was prepared, yet there were three empty chairs. And there were three plates of food which had rotted and then suddenly— vanished. The wind blew open the door and blew the food off the three plates and onto the floor. Cora Cox grabbed her broom and swept the dead food out the door and against the wind. She was mightier than the wind and the food flew fast and hard to the earth. Cora Cox stood strong, in the doorway, head-on to the wind and bolted into the field directly into the flower garden. The flower pack was wild and fierce, determined to stay planted, but she yanked out a family and ran to the house.

Cora Cox ate and ate. She ripped and sheared through the beef, exhausted the garden, gulped the wine, inhaled the tea. Then she ate from the tree— and the caramel soiled her lips. The wind blew in and the soft chill settled deep into her body. She ripped off her clothes in defiance and the knowledge enveloped her. Time had a clock and it was wound.

A sort of settling occurs in a body after a good book or a rich meal. Consequently, Cora Cox laid her naked back against the still mattress of her bed. The ceiling's gray gravel pounded down onto her and the room ticked. It was as if the seed of her brain had been watered and the plant was growing and it was growing fast. Vines weaved through graves of a past neatly buried and unmourned. Avoidance can caress a body for forty years, but locks break and even if you prepare a meal that is unlocked, the magnitude of a flood can never really be controlled. The chest laid open.

Cora Cox's hand had slipped out of the gap to force itself into the hope chest; it plunged its finger into a wedding band. The little diamond had fallen out of the

setting and the band was tarnished with all the luster sucked out leaving only two thick bars formed into one closed hoop. The hand dug deeper retrieving a solid, round glass ball. Her husband, Bud Cox had given this fist sized ball to Cora Bea when they were in grade school. Cora Bea and Bud had been in his tree house telling ghost stories one night and Bud handed her the glass ball.

"I found it in Old Man Bob's shed. You can't show anybody I gave it to ya, but it's a crystal ball— Tells the future." Bud looked down at his feet and shifted his weight. "Go on take it. Don't be chicken."

"I'm not. Whatta I do."

"You just look into it and it tells you your future."

"I don't see nothin'. It's empty."

"Hold it up to me. See my face don't ya?"

"Oh, yah. Hey, you look all mixed up."

Cora Cox rolled the ball along her face and down her naked body. Then she threw the old thing out her bedroom window.

Next to where the glass ball had laid in the chest were two new born sized, pink, hand knitted sweaters. The first born sweater had the name Luella embroidered on the front and the second had the name Graisha embroidered on the back. Cora Bea gently rested her hands on the sweaters for she had not the courage to lift the immortality which pulsed in the threads. The dull void of expression lifted from her eyes and the water from her body and the light in the room boiled and burned at the brown of her eyes leaving hints of greenness. She raised her oldest daughter's sweater and held it against her face. The tiny fibers touched her and begged for her as she inhaled the soft powdered scents weaved with the sweet fleshy odor of her baby. Then came a surge of hope within the possibility of redemption and she beheld Graisha's sweater and picked the fragile blonde hairs off the neck line and sleeves. Cora Cox brushed the dead hairs into her own red locks of hair unleashing Time. Red locks opened to gray and time was catching up.

She reached deeper into the chest past old coins, charm bracelets, dried flowers, four leaf clovers, and pulled

out a snake skin purse. Cora Bea unfastened the purse clasp and removed a pile of papers tied with a knot of burlap. She flipped through the paper headings and slid out a note from her husband.

Dearest Cora Bea,

I am sorry Bea. I told ya I was a Arkansas traveler. Martha might be too young for me but she knows things and she says the rivers are free and fast in California. Movie stars, all the whiskey a man could need, and gold for everybody.

Take care of the girls Bea. Tell them their daddy is a moving star.

They will be proud.

Love Bud Cox

Bud never made it out of Arkansas. He made a wrong turn and ended up on the east end of Arkansas where he was killed in a bar fight in Wilson. Someone must have dumped him in the Mississippi because he washed down south and was found dead on the river bank in Helena just two months after he had left Cora Bea and the girls. Nobody ever said what became of Martha, but that did not matter to Cora Bea Cox. The city sheriff brought Bud's body to Cora Bea on July 4, 1946 and she buried him east of the garden.

It was a time of war— the world was in battle. The United States had called upon Nurse Cora Bea Cox to aide wounded and sick soldiers returned home from battle. The girls, nine and eleven years old, were left in the care of a neighbor and Cora Bea reported for duty in Hope, Arkansas.

A month had past and Cora Bea received news that her daughters were ill with scarlet fever. Cora Bea took leave from the hospital and returned to her farm in Lincoln to find that Graisha, her youngest, had died an hour before her return. Two days later, Luella, her eldest, died on September 13, 1946. They were buried next to their father, east of the garden.

Cora Bea slid the farewell note from her husband back into the pile of papers and under the knotted burlap. The papers included her family's birth and death certificates,

the original bill of sale on the farm, the deed to the house, and all other papers that give a person identity and recognition in the world. Her life was in her hand— she untied the knot of burlap and let the papers fall with fate.

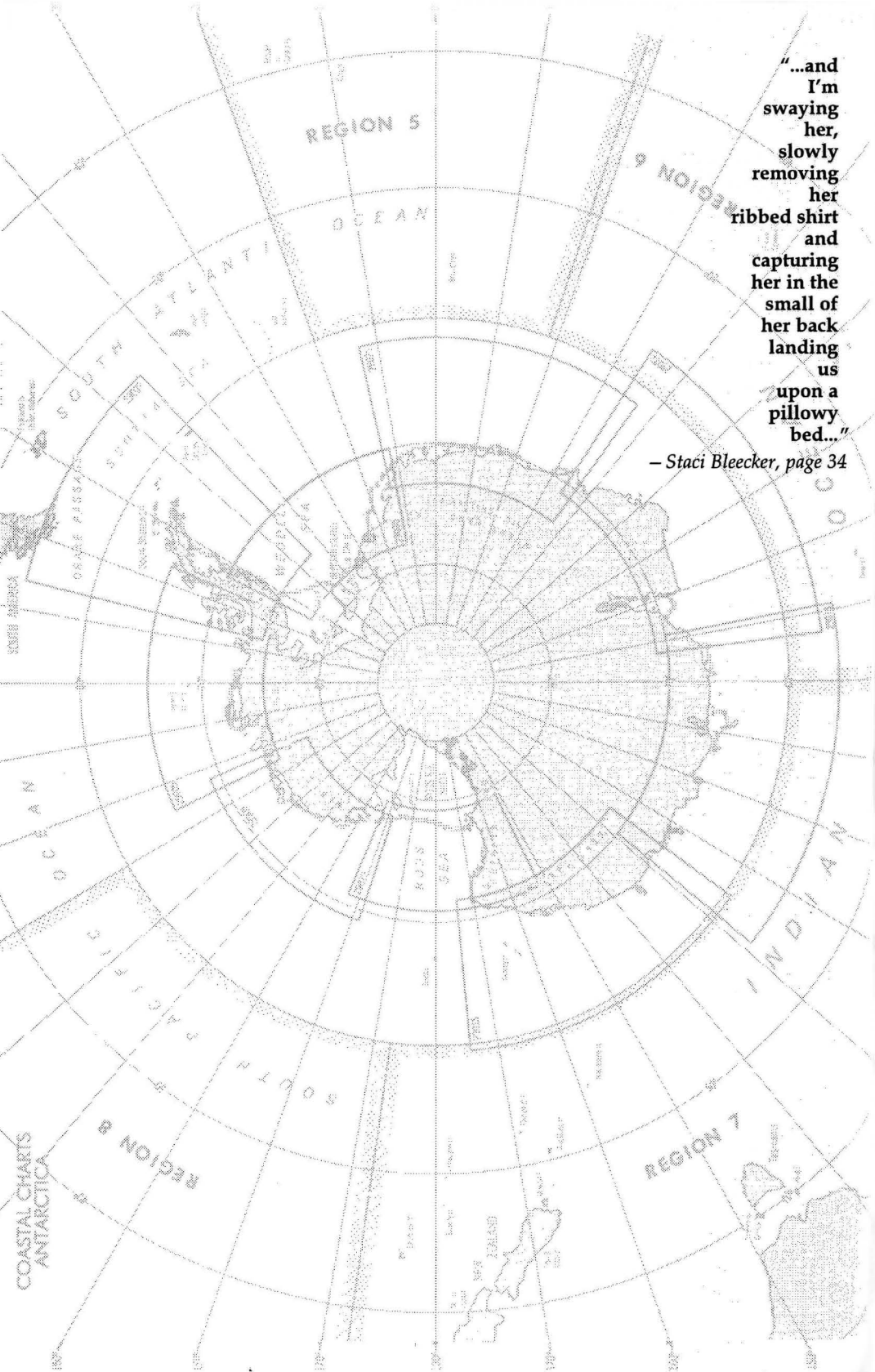
Cora pulled Luella's and Graisha's sweaters over her arms, put on Bud's pin-striped overalls and she sat on the floor— in the room— in the dark— and it ticked. Cora crawled into a ball— face on the floor— in the room— in the dark— and it ticked. Her body rocked back and forth— like a baby— in a crib— without a mother. And it was good.

The floods came. (The heart points and shoots rivers through the veins only to flood the limbs and in devastation the agony settles against the skin's inner walls— trapped. The human body is limited as is time.) Tonight Cora cried.

She cried for the first time in forty years. She ran around the house waving her arms, smashing windows, ripping wallpaper, throwing her best china against the walls. The storm came from outside and the rain sheared through the broken windows and flooded into the old house. Cora bolted the door open and called out into the storm, "Dog . . . Dog . . . Dog . . ." The hound did not come. Cora ran into the bedroom. She grabbed her rifle from its cabinet.

The rain called her and she ran into it. She ran past the garden to the east. Three graves smiled at her and welcomed her powerless soul. She dug into the graves with her hands like a fox digging into a nest. She dug deep through soil, through clay, through marl, through calcareous muds and hit bottom at the three coffins. Cora stood up pointed her rifle at Bud and shot straight through the coffin into his heart, shattering his ribs to the earth, to dust— from which he came. She ran to the middle of the garden and picked seed-bearing fruit from the tree of life. And she laid the fruit inside her daughters' coffins. Cora's white hair rinsed with the rain.

Cora and her daughters hopped into the Ford pick-up and drove away. The lightning struck down the old dogtrot house. It struck down the fence that had enclosed the cattle. The floods washed away the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Cora looked back and the tree of life was growing and it was growing fast.✽



"...and I'm swaying her, slowly removing her ribbed shirt and capturing her in the small of her back landing us upon a pillow bed..."

- Staci Bleecker, page 34

COASTAL CHARTS
ANTARCTICA

D Desert Woman

Kitty
Nard

Steadfast rocks
witnessed
the barren birth
of this creature
who now adorns herself
with wild flowers and
dances with tumbleweeds.
Arms raised in benediction,
swirling dust devils,
she invokes the god of Joshua.
His blazing breath
loosens her hold;
roots breaking away,
she lifts her parched
breasts and shouts:
I am not afraid.
I will rise to greet
the icy stillness
of Your full moon.

C

hrist is a
Lazy Fuck

Alexis
Frixione

(version #1 revised)

Half the world lies down to sleep in machine conditioned buildings and leaves the city deserted until they drag their heavy hearts to punch their time cards goodbye another day. They leave those arrogant tall buildings far behind on a seven lane road sealed shut with half the city's cars killing to get home only to wait in dreams of open summer fields until work begins again on a similar seven lane road dead stop with half the city honking the sun up into the morning sky. After wearing their teeth down on airtight traffic they walk straight through their doors, through their bathrooms too tired to hug their children or read them to sleep, and instead lie in bed with their four hundred degree nerves stitching insomnia to their pinned open eyes as they dream of empty bloodshot flower fields on which the sun bounces off the green grass coughing up a puddle of cool dew in every direction on every bounce.

Gino, a nine year old kid, shares a square closet and a bed with four cousins and their pebble-filled shoes. They play on mountains of stones that will be used to make the church bigger. For now the forgotten kids use the stones for wars as they hide behind hills or in trenches of stones hurling rocks at each other as they laugh and duck and bury themselves under mountains of pebbles. Nobody comes near the church until sunday so they occasionally break one or two stained glass windows that are bigger than their beds. They crawl through the cracked window into a vacant world of spirits that don't pay rent. The spirits sleep on the carpet. The closets are bigger than castles. The children half petrified giggle and dance through the empty halls that lead everywhere inside the enormous church.

Their ankles and shins are sliced open from the stained glass splinters that they climbed through. They play hide and go seek until the man climbs off the cross and then they run like never before through any stain glass window they can find. They run straight home to see their parents climb in through their bedroom windows into bed, dead tired from work.

Since the kids began playing inside the church, Jesus Christ hasn't said a fucking thing. He wakes up with the noise of children laughing and washes the dried blood off his eyes with the back of his fist. As if he were thawing out of hibernation he climbs down to the carpet beneath him. He stretches his arms and peels plaster from the back of his fucking rotting hand. He stands there for a while fighting off eternal sleep. He watches the kids run by. He doesn't yell at them or throw fucking rocks at them, he doesn't even console them, he just groans like a pathetic asshole down the hollow hallway toward the drinking fountain. He sobs, dragging his bleeding feet across the carpet. His hysterical wails eventually end when he reaches the motorized drinking fountain. He fucking waits to catch his breath before he takes a long drink that ends up soaking his dried bloody beard that has grown thicker in death. The fucking spirits all sit up to watch. They stare amazed at his giant fucking forearms that haven't moved a single brick in thousands of years. They watch his dusty calves expand like tanks as he treads back down the hall. By the time he gets back to his cross he is yawning so fucking wide that some paint peels off the side of his mouth and like an infant he forgets he was ever crying. He nails himself back to his wooden bed and his pillow stuffed with thorns and dreams of summer fields in which children bounce like balls with the sun on the dew of the green grass while he sits alone in a corner of the field in piles of overgrown weeds and flowers, feeling sorry for himself. »

Warrior Daughter

Kitty
Nard

Trained in the jungles
of a child's bedroom,
she learned to
follow orders
and to surrender.

*I don't know
but I've been told
little girl pussy
is good as gold.*

Drafted into combat,
she became the
prisoner of a war
she did not start
and could not win.

*Left, left,
left, right,
left.*

Night after night
raids stripped
away her honor,
drilling into her
that body counts.

*hut,
hut,
hut, two,
three, four.*

Although disciplined
to know her enemy,
the soldier father's
friendly fire was
taking her out.

Company halt!

No rescue in sight,
humping drugs and men
became the weapon of
her private search and
destroy mission.

Forward march!

With a black and blue
heart, she disappeared;
no medals for the
wounded daughter
who did not fight the
real war.

*I don't know
but I've been told
M.I.A. pussy
is mighty cold.*

The Ocean

Christopher
Sedlmeyer

When the open O's got louder
and each word
fell against the dresser
or banged into the wall
and made the pictures rattle
I could listen for it
underneath, in my ears
the ocean
moving in a rhythm
like a familiar story
that tired rumble and cough
the pause
and the sand whispering for quiet
to hear better
to lie in peace
to watch the sun go down
and feel the orange breath of dusk
speak softly into sleep.

D

escent to the Ice Goddess

Desiree
Wold

As a child growing up in the late sixties and seventies, I lived in a small city located in central North Dakota, a state known primarily for its relentlessly flat landscape and its severe winters. Because the winters were long and hard, often stretching from late October to early April, snow, ice and biting wind are woven through all my memories--a high contrast to the warm, softly lit interiors within which I engaged in intense reading marathons under old blankets and quilts piled high and heavy, forever framed in my mind by the biting windy sub-zero elements just outside the window.



In the days before cable, the three television networks routinely showed their holiday movies and shows in the weeks between Halloween and New Year's Day. I remember watching *The Wizard of Oz* every Thanksgiving, the Technicolor red red slippers on Dorothy's feet that glittered so magically on screen enchanted me temporarily away from the black and white text in my books. This may have been the only time of the year my obsession with reading was interrupted for any length of time. While most of these shows were tame and light-hearted, one in particular, *The Snow Queen*, seemed to darken the night outside the windows, while the story reached its long mythological fingers into my young chest and my breathing became shallow at the satisfying icing up of my heart. The familiarity of being told something you know. The recognition of something present but not spoken out loud, of sadness, of fear, of pain. The loneliness I felt deep inside that I tried to fill with book after book and childish fantasies.

I do not know why I was attracted to this darkness. I had a relatively uneventful, secure, happily cluttered life as

the oldest of five children with parents who loved us. Yet, I imagined myself, even at a young age, trapped in this traditional family life, in the middle of a safe and carefree community from which I felt emotionally and spiritually cut off, and when I saw the darkness, the coldness and the loneliness in the sharp, pale grays and sparkling whites of the ice queen sitting high on her throne, I felt my soul rouse itself as if from a deep sleep and vibrate in response. It was as if I were meeting her in person after so many encounters in my unremembered dreams. I wonder here that I may be stretching the boundaries of what anyone might believe, what I believe really happened myself, my memories of what really happened swelling and filling up with meaning over the years well beyond credibility. An attraction to any story with a dark interior is somehow about the telling of a myth older than all of us, often hidden under the romantic notion of the light-hearted. I think it could have been afternoons spent in unnaturally still, frosted over woods behind my family home alone, the crunch of the snow under my feet the only sound, no birds chirping, no animals rummaging under brush. Or maybe it is about how being American is about being lonely, something I read somewhere once.

The dark story, the televised, animated version of Hans Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen* is lighter than the original tale. I recently read it and discovered how it all began with a magical mirror that shattered and spread out all over the world, causing all the problems one could imagine. The story goes something like this:



The most powerful troll in the world invented a mirror that distorted everything and anything that was reflected in it. If something was beautiful, it appeared ugly. If something was sane, it appeared crazy. This was the source of much humor and entertainment for all the trolls and of course they liked to carry it around and hold it up to all the beautiful things in the world. They also reflected the ugly things as well, including themselves, because the mirror made them appear pleasant, friendly and attractive,

a particularly entertaining sight.

Eventually, one of them got the idea of carrying the mirror up into the heavens to the angels because they must be the most beautiful things in existence and the mirror would make them appear uglier than anything else in the world. The mirror was big and heavy though and as the trolls flew closer toward God with it, the mirror began to reflect the love and beauty as horror and hate and it started to shake from the intensity, laughing so hard at the contrasts, that it slipped from the trolls' hold and tumbled down, back to the earth. Upon impact, it shattered into a billion tiny pieces. The winds, who do not understand or discriminate between good pollen and dangerous sharp glass, lifted these pieces up into the sky and carried them throughout the whole world.

Now some of these pieces were so tiny one would need a microscope to see them, but they each contained by themselves all the magic of the original mirror. And this is when they really began to cause trouble for human beings. Some of the pieces of mirror were so tiny and so sharp that they could get into a person's eye and distort the beauty of the world forever for that person. Since so much of the world is beautiful, now for these poor people who got the glass in their eye, the world became mostly frightening and scary. They hid in terror from the dangers they perceived. But the most serious problem, the most dangerous for all, was when a piece of the mirror flew into a person's heart. It turned the person's heart to ice. It is said that some of these pieces are still flying through the air today.



My first memory of my Aunt Pat is actually a memory of a picture. The 8 x 10 in the gilded silver frame was kept in my grandmother's spare bedroom on the top of a high dresser until my grandmother died and my aunt took it. I do not know where it is now, since my aunt has since divorced her husband of 25 years and I do not think she keeps it displayed in her new condo. In the picture is a very blond and stylish young woman on her wedding day, flanked on one side by her attendants dressed in pale teal-

colored bridesmaid dresses and flanked on the other by her new handsome husband and groomsmen in black tuxedos. It was taken on a day probably in early summer, the grass a bright artificial green from the heavy spring rains, contrasting with a blue sky, the black tuxes, the teal bridesmaid dresses and the bright reflective white of my aunt's wedding gown. The photograph has that sort of soft colorized look to it, so different from the clear bright colors of today's photographs. In my mind it is all slightly blurred--the colors blending at the edges where they met, no clear distinctions at the boundaries. This is where the green ends, the blue begins. In order to get the whole wedding party in the picture, the photographer has moved back and the faces are indistinct, blurred a bit as well, albeit, no one is missing.



It is cold. It draws one in hypnotically--the offering of numbness. Freedom from the struggle. Out alone in the woods there is the beauty of death. Of quiet. No birds sing. It is winter. I remember lacing my skates up with stiffening fingers. Try to move fast so they don't freeze. Breathing heavy through the thick red scarf, my matching red mittens bright against the whiteness of the snow. All alone, I skate on the uneven frozen surface of the creek which winds erratically in the depths behind my family's house, lost behind the bare tree branches, thick upon each other, cutting off any view of movement, of life. The scratch scratch of my skate blades against the crystallized crust. I skate an imaginary swan princess performance. A large branch sticks up through the middle of the bend--inviting me to rest from the struggle of moving. My glasses fog up clumsily from the steam escaping out from under the scarf. I must be about fifteen with large clunky glasses and braces--hardly a swan. My ears are spiking in numbness--freezing up literally. I put my big mittens over them to warm them, save them.



I do not know why that fairy princess wedding picture fascinated me then except that it represented some idea of what being female was supposed to mean. It shared space with other wonderful objects: my grandmother's jewelry box full of big garish pieces of costume jewelry--overflowing with matched sets of earrings, necklaces and bracelets--pasted designs of cut rhinestones--red, blue, green, purple, yellow--hanging heavy on my tender young ear lobes and pressing against my skinny girl chest; the bracelets sliding up to my arm pits--almost big enough to wear as a choker; and the cut glass bottles of perfume. My young mind attached the glamour of the photograph to the jewelry and perfume, or to the colors of the photograph itself--the magically soft and blurred colors behind glass that turned the ordinary people of my family, especially my practical and modest mother into a princess bridesmaid in a long gown into a fairy tale story.



The story goes something like this. It began three years ago at about the same time that my husband relapsed from a long period of sobriety, although the events are unrelated. Or maybe it was only two years ago. At least though, it was some time ago when first my great aunt Bertha, who lived in Spokane, WA, died after many years of suffering from Alzheimer's. She had been in poor physical health, due to her nerves, I believe, until the Alzheimer's came on. Then she had lived peacefully without memory for many years. But finally, as I said, she did pass away. My aunt and mother traveled to Washington state to make funeral arrangements and dispose of her few remaining possessions.

A few months later, after they returned home, my aunt's best friend, who had been fighting cancer for a few years with success, had yet another recurrence and after several months, also died. Then, just a few months after that, my aunt's long-time boss and landlord, a feisty woman lawyer in her eighties, died as well, leaving my aunt, in her mid-fifties, both jobless, and eminently homeless. My aunt, after suffering these blows, took to her

bed and refused to do anything. This is what is termed in contemporary psychology as a nervous breakdown. My mother was distressed and ultimately sought medical experts to help and my aunt was immediately identified as suicidal and hospitalized in the local psych ward. Despite all the progress of modern medicine and study of the human mind, specific labels are actually hard to pin down. The experts labeled her as depressed and began the first of a series of drug treatments to "bring her up." This period ended with my aunt's first suicide attempt.

She had been released from the hospital and was struggling through her days at home alone. She continued to try working part-time for her boss's former legal partner. One day at lunch, she drove her car out to the west side of town and rolled it "accidentally" in a single car accident. The roads were clear. There was no black ice and, more significantly, according to the patrol officer, there were no skid marks. My aunt was once again hospitalized.



Mood, in all of the depressive states associated with manic-depressive illness, is identified as bleak, pessimistic and despairing. A deep sense of futility is often accompanied, if not preceded by the belief that the ability to experience pleasure is permanently gone. There is a general impairment of feeling. Suicidal thinking and behavior are not uncommon.



In the silence of the winter, midday, there is little sense of time. The sun is lost behind a pale white-grey sky. There is light, but it seems sourceless. There are no apparent shadows. Under the frosty impure and swollen creek ice, I can see the black earth. The creek is only a half a foot deep here so, even though it is only early December, it is frozen solid through. Dark branches loom overhead, reaching, stretching, framework forming a canopy high over my head. The snap of a twig echoes throughout the woods. But

I am not afraid. Not of another person coming. No one is coming. It is only myself I face in this silence, my mind breathing in the whiteness, reflecting it, my mind expanding to fill the space between the frozen creek bed and the dark canopy.



As a young girl I dreamed of being the fairy tale princess so familiar in stories like Cinderella and Snow White. These tales told me to desire passivity, physical beauty, the handsome male energy to save me from the dangers of the patriarchal world. Those were my conscious daydreams. I didn't know enough to question them. But at night, it was the goddess herself that called to me from the matriarchal world. *It is I that you want. I am the power. You are powerful through me.* And I saved this information away deep, buried where no one could see it or contradict it.



Thus it is the shattering of the magical mirror that is the impetus of the Snow Queen tale, in which the young male character, Kai, has the unlucky fate of catching a tiny piece of that sharp glass in his heart and thus begins to see the world through the distorted perspective of one who is unloved and unloving. He is easily lured away from his family when he hitches his sled to the back of the Snow Queen's sleigh for a ride. She flies away to her palace of ice far away in the north, leaving his family behind to wonder at his disappearance. In this version of the journey myth, the little boy has become the damsel in distress as his young female friend, Gerda, begins her journey as protagonist to find and save him. But I know that her journey lies not outward in the world but rather in the deep, deep down place of the ice palace, to the goddess herself.

Gerda first goes to the river where the villagers believe the young boy has drowned. There she throws her new red shoes into the river hoping for an exchange. One pair of new red shoes for her best friend. The river's water carries

the shoes back to her, as if to say, we don't have him. She climbs into a boat in order to throw the shoes even further out. The boat begins to drift and gets pulled into the current which takes the young girl and her red shoes downstream. Eventually, she drifts near a strange little house owned by an elderly woman who comes out and rescues the poor Gerda. There is a lot of rescuing in the story of the *Snow Queen*. She takes her home to stay with her. Behind the house in an enclosed garden where flowers bloom eternally, even out of season. It appears that the old woman is a witch--although not an evil witch, just a lonely witch. Content, Gerda stays until one day she sees a rose, which reminds her of the rose that had grown on the terrace between her home and Kai's, which reminds her that she is on a journey and has stayed too long. When she escapes the walls of the garden, she discovers it is already fall--the summer has passed her by.



When I first met my husband, he was sober and I was naive. Misunderstanding the disease, I thought I had found my prince, like the ones I'd read about in story after story, the prince of Cinderella, of Snow White. Better yet, he was a contemporary man--he was sensitive. I willingly became his princess and for several years we played at making our own fairy tale relationship. It was the fairy tale I thought my aunt was also living and modeling for me. But in my family, the dark stories underneath are never revealed until the end. Even now as I write this, I do not speak about my husband's continued relapses during the weekly phone conversations with my family. About his outbursts of drunken angry rages. About how grateful I am that he has never hit me. I know they must know for I am not talking happily about his sobriety. Absence of information says it all. My stories are caged in silence between the words. I am forever caught between telling my story and not telling his, not appropriating and all I want to do is appropriate. Control him. Change him. Fix him. And they do not want to ask, do not want to have what they know confirmed, do not want to have what they know denied.

After 25 years, my aunt divorced her husband because he was an alcoholic. It was the first time that she revealed this to us that he drank too much--the first time we knew. Alcoholic families are experts at not telling. She did model for me a fairy tale marriage, and I do my best to emulate it. We all agree silently not to feel the humiliation of it all by not recognizing it, by not giving it the power of words. That is our lie--the lie that says not telling stories makes them just fairy tales.



Table 2-5. Mood Symptoms and Nonpsychotic Cognitive and Perceptual Symptoms During Bipolar Depression^a

Symptom	%
Mood Symptoms	
Melancholy	100
Tearfulness	94
Irritability	76
Hopelessness	52
Cognitive and Perceptual Symptoms	
Self-deprecatory	97
Insight Present on admission	91
Self-accusatory	91
Poor Concentration	91
Diminished clarity of thought	91
Diminished speed of thought	91
Suicidal thoughts	82
Poor memory	52
Fear of losing mind	48
Excessive concern with finances	45
Fear of death	33
Obsessions	6

a. Thirty-three depressive episodes in 21 bipolar patients.



When my aunt first became ill, my mother and I finally talked in some depth, with some frankness, about their deceased younger brother, who had been diagnosed manic-depressive, and about their father, my grandfather, who had committed suicide by shooting himself in the head in the barn when they were all still young children. His suicide had never been explained and it was a mystery to them--what had brought it all on? My grandmother never spoke of it. There was some subdued speculation that it was preceded by a diagnosis of cancer or some other terminal disease for which there was no hope in those years. But, I suggested to my mother for the first time, in light of my aunt's health, to my former uncle's health, that his suicide could have been related to his own depression, or even possible manic-depressed condition. Several years earlier, my aunt, who was the oldest and so remembers the most, had told me she vaguely remembered his drinking bouts. Suddenly, our normal, middle-class American family life was revealed to me to be filled with hidden alcoholism, hidden mental illness. And the denial by silence that had cut me off from the knowing, the understanding. Perhaps, my childhood was just a little too good to be true. The fairy tale childhood--my parent's myth.



Untreated manic-depressive illness is, by any measure, gravely serious--complex in its origins, diverse in its expression, unpredictable in its course, severe in its recurrences, and often fatal in its outcome. The personal, interpersonal, and social consequences, which are usually severe, can include suicide, violence, alcoholism, drug abuse and hospitalization. It can push patients to the limits of their resources. It is a complicated and frustrating illness, seemingly impossible to sort through. It takes a heavy emotional toll on family members and friends, the repercussions of which add further psychological stress to the patient. The illness often seems within the patient's control, yet it is not. It often carries with it a psychotic

diagnosis, an uncertain course, and a lifetime of medication. Especially when not treated early and aggressively, it is costly in loss of self-esteem, disrupted relationships, secondary alcoholism and drug abuse, economic chaos, hospitalizations, lost jobs, years consumed by illness, and suicide.

Manic-depressive patients also use denial to cope with their illness. Even in the presence of severe and obvious pathology, they deny its severity, the odds of it recurring, its consequences and at times its very existence. Like anger, denial is a normal response to the unpleasant, the painful, the unpredictable, and the destructive in life. Not to deny some aspects of a serious disease, such as manic-depressive illness, would be unusual, even troubling. Clearly denial is an essential part of healing, allowing slow assimilation of otherwise overwhelming thoughts and feelings. The treatment of denial, although not always successful, frequently becomes easier as time passes and the illness reappears too often to disown, even unconsciously. Denial can be weakened also by exploring in psychotherapy the meaning of the illness for the patient. Ongoing education about the natural history of the illness, with emphasis on its high relapse rate, also undercuts the process of denial, as do discussions of the risks and benefits of medication.



In the cold winter woods behind my family's house, I go to skate alone on the narrow winding creek--a rough and buckled surface broken by fallen tree branches and other debris rising up from the black surface below the ice. Land of the Ice Queen lies somewhere behind the layers of trees farther back, back beyond where I can see. I would go alone to find her there, to find myself. She was beautiful and powerful. Self sufficient. Some version of the mother earth goddess, the goddess of winter. Of death and hibernation. What part of me wishes to hibernate? It urges me into the dark and the cold. Just to lie down on the powdery surface next to the creek for a moment. To close my eyes and dream.



The second time my aunt attempted suicide, it was on a hot sticky summer night. Like many other towns that formed on the plains in the late 1800s, my home town grew up along the railroad tracks. Farmers from the outlying areas would bring their harvested grains into the grain elevators, where it was transferred onto the trains for transport east. Tracks crisscross the town. The tracks even cross the entrance to the housing community just east of town where my parents live and I remember waiting at the turnoff from the highway for trains passing through, ritually waving to the caboose man as the train passed.

My brother listens to the police scanner in the evenings. On this particular night, he heard a call come in that a car was sitting on the tracks just east of town, at the turnoff of a private road into an old abandoned farmstead about a half mile from where my folks live. The voice on the radio identified the color of the car and license plate number. My brother immediately recognized the number as belonging to my aunt's car and quickly called my folks. The line was busy and he had to call the operator to break into the line. Meanwhile my parents, who still do not have air conditioning, were sitting at their kitchen table in front of the open windows in want of a cool evening breeze. They could hear the loud repeated warning of the train whistle and the horrible screech of wheels on tracks, metal on metal, of a train applying its brakes hard. The sound filled the house. Simultaneously, my father took the emergency call from my brother, who told them about the police scanner announcement. They quickly ran out of the house to their car, knowing exactly in their minds, where she was sitting, waiting.

When they reached the tracks leading out to the highway, the train was stopped, blocking the entrance. They had to turn back and travel several miles in the opposite direction on a maze of gravel roads to get to the crossing where my aunt had parked her car. My brother was already there, as well as a high patrol officer, waiting along with my silent aunt, whose life was spared by a fast thinking and

fast acting train engineer, waiting for her new psychiatrist and the ambulance to arrive and take her away to the hospital again. I imagine my mother didn't sleep that night. Although, perhaps she did. It is the nights my aunt is alone in her condo that my mother worries most.

Sometimes I think my mother had five children as a form of insurance against being left alone in the world. But, of course, she had had all of us long before she lost first her brother to heat stroke, then her mother to cancer, and now her sister to insanity.



After Gerda escapes the old witch's eternal blooming garden, she travels on in search of her friend Kai. She meets up and visits a fairy tale prince and princess who dress her in fine clothes and give her a carriage to travel in. While journeying in the carriage, Gerda is attacked and captured by an outlaw band and forced to become a playmate for a little spoiled girl who is the daughter of the leader. The robber girl takes pity on her though and when the doves in the robber's lair tell Gerda that Kai has been taken to the Snow Queen's castle far away in the north, the robber girl helps her escape on a reindeer.



The winter before my husband and I moved to Southern California, the weather in North Dakota was particularly severe. Nearly every weekend in January, there was a blizzard. About dusk on Friday night, the winds would start to pick up and the snow on the ground would blow and begin to drift. Snow blows from the sides of the roads, where it has been plowed up off of the road. Sifting down, sifting down over and over, until the road begins to fill back up. The snow doesn't drift in smoothly for one even coating—it drifts in parts, creating a series of bare polished ice spots interrupted by peaked furrows of fine, compacted snow. When you drive through it, it is like traveling on the water during high winds, the waves rising up into ridges against the front bottom of the boat like solid

resistant barriers, causing you to hit them and then push through, hit the next drift and push through.

A young farm kid, still in his teens, tried to drive an open road home in one of those blizzards that winter. In North Dakota, everything is so open and flat that it is possible to drive right off a highway and into a ditch and only know you've left the road because you've hit a barbed wire fence. That boy was considered to be very lucky--to have survived a night without emergency supplies in his car, alone. I wonder now, how he will farm his family's land, having lost both his arms and his legs, amputated because of the hypothermia and frostbite.



When you have been out in the cold for a long time, your hands and feet go numb. They are the farthest from your heart, farthest from the supply of warm blood. I rub my hands together, take off my mittens and breathe the moist air from my lungs into them, clenching them, unclenching them and put my gloves back on. It is getting dark. There is no setting sun to see, it is the gradual receding of the light, the encroachment of the dark. I cannot feel my toes anymore. I have been skating on the creek which winds like a snake in the woods behind my parent's house. It is suddenly time to go in. I struggle up the embankment still in my skates, grabbing onto exposed tree limbs and tough dead grasses to pull myself up. The darkness brings with it fear. The cloud cover that has hung ominously overhead all day has parted and I see glimpses of a pale wintry moon rising slowly in the sky through the bare tree branches. I am young, but instinct tells me to get to shelter soon.



Expecting the treatment of manic-depressive illness to proceed in a straightforward manner is likely to create secondary problems. As new medications, like prozac, are created and used, so are new expectations regarding immediate cures. Periods of normal time are often affected

by the fear of a recurrence of the illness. Many patients maintain a deep and fatalistic pessimism, however entwined with denial and optimism, about becoming manic or depressed again.



I can't talk right now she whispers, almost indistinguishable from the silence filling the void of the telephone line. It sounds like the wind blowing through bare trees. She is far far away, almost out of reach. Definitely out of reach.



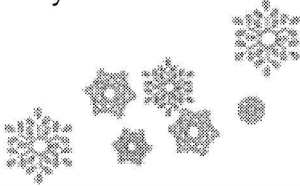
Gerda finds her way eventually to the Ice Queen's palace. It is as far north as one can go, into the deep frozen lands where the ground is forever buried under thousands of feet of ice and snow. The palace is made of snow and is so large, it has a frozen lake at the center, smooth and rock hard, which the Snow Queen calls the Lake of Reason. In the middle of the frozen lake, is the Ice Queen's throne, lit only by the reflection of the northern stars on the ice of the lake and the windows and doors made of sharp winds that cut the skin. There Gerda finds Kai alone, frozen blue, his eyes and heart now completely filled with slivers of magical glass ice.

Gerda cries warm, melting tears of sorrow onto his chest and the tears slide into his heart and wash out the slivers there that keep him from feeling the pain of the cold. Then he cries as well and his own tears wash away the slivers in his eyes, the ones that keep him from seeing and recognizing his old friend Gerda. Happily they are reunited.



Avoidance of pain is a survival instinct. Survival of the fittest. I can't talk right now, she whispers. And she recedes out of reach of the pain, out of reach of me. I am the pain. I am the recognition of the pain. When I reach the house, my feet are completely numb. Inside, I quickly, clumsily with

stiff cold fingers untie the laces of my skates. I strip off my thick socks and rub my blue feet. After a few moments, the pain comes, streaking, sharp, like pieces of broken glass, through my feet. The pain being the recognition of my life, of my survival.



It has been over two years. Right now, we live one day at a time. In many regards. My aunt is recovering, feeling normal, thanks to the newest medication. She is in a new relationship, with the widower of her former best friend, the one who died three years ago of cancer. There are the issues of proper decorum. Of appearances. It is a small town where people believe in decorum and relationships extending beyond death. But we remember the train tracks. The cancer. The friendship. The love. We know that there is only today. That there is only yesterday. That very little matters. Except the pain and the process. My husband continues to drink and slowly die one swallow of ice at a time. I have to believe in the magic of the story, of the mirror. When modern medicine continues to fail my aunt, my husband, and me. What answer is there but one as simple and as mysterious as a magical mirror? Its pieces must have slipped into the hearts and eyes of those I love. I am Gerda, wishing it were so easy--to simply cry my tears of sorrow onto their chests. I have tears enough. I know the way to the Ice Queen's palace. I have sat on her throne. I try to remember to find shelter in time.❧

*All medical information and the chart on manic-depressive symptoms are from *Manic-Depressive Illness* by Kay Redfield Jamison.

YOU
HAVE TO BE
CAREFUL IN

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WHEN THE MOON IS FULL

BECAUSE

THE NIGHT DANCES SOFTLY
TO A RHYTHM ALL ITS OWN,
AND CATS CREEP ACROSS STREETS
WITH ILLUMINATING EYES

AND YOU KNOW THAT MOON IS
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE NIGHT

BECAUSE

SOMETHING UNEXPLAINABLE
TUGS AT YOUR BEING
AND YOU WANT TO EMBRACE THE MOON

BUT IT'S TOO FAR
AND TOO FULL

FOR SOMEONE LIKE YOU TO GRAB IT AND KEEP IT FOR YOURSELF,

SO

YOU JUST SIT AND WATCH ITS BEWITCHING BEAUTY FROM AFAR.

-Carolyn Hopkins

the wood chipper devoured the doll.
shanghaied
by an asteroid
-David Walter

-Theresa Vessel

He loves his life,
but he's only 7.
-Sweet and Savage

Everything
is
automatic.

-Stephanie Satie

You fucked up, cowboy.

-Katharina Lamm

in every hotel in the greater
Bay Area that allows large dogs.

-Susan Trieste

When I turned fifteen, my eyes opened
and my hair fell into place.

-Amber Cross

lost
I heard,
I was
an
English
major.

-Paul Goetz

It was a stormy night during the

French

Revolution.
-Theresa Vansell

I want to have

one day a week
I'm not mentally unstable,

to myself.

to relax in a country
nor has anyone been unkind to me,

free of roots

and religion
but sometimes I cry.

-Amber Cross

space.
-Lynette Morini

I am no

longer

and time zones.

-Canan Tasci

on

this

shopping

list.

-La Rue Driscoll

gang-banged
Sitting, in the dark,
with sunglasses on, a bar of soap in the mouth,
a keyboard on the knees, People magazine

under a bowl of soup,
Dr. Albert Humphrey is saying:
that's not what I meant

-Adam J. Wood

Some say medication helps
but it helps only the medicated.
It doesn't help the disorganized.

-Noreen Laine

Man is a paleontological embarrassment

-Nina Weston

Not a single fucking trick in sight

-Pavanjit Chhabara

SHOVE THAT BUTOLIC MOO UP A COW'S ASS

-Angela Cirocco

(Your words here.)

Cheryl is now
somewhat forever
chained to my
sink.

-Jeff Brown

A

pril

Ate

Josh
Filan

April ate a hole
sideways through my head
like meningitis

making a tunnel
onto a highway
with lucid green lights and
signs hectic red

Watching our car:
a '77 dented Dart Swinger
a mythological machine
an American failure
a sweaty back seat
go nowhere

but drive itself
driving me crazy
watching you
slide the wheel
under your fingers
and beat up knuckles
lusting for comfort
left then right

wishing you'd spit
out the words
"if I find a better place
I won't be back"
instead you say nothing
and look ahead

as I move backwards
painting the streets
with ashes and sparks
lighting the sky
and moving the wind

closing my eyes and
grinding you down
to an unforgettable whiteness.

Looking Back

Lynnette
Morinini

My sister is a sonnet,
~a haiku.

Unspoken words
upon sealed envelopes
never sent.

My tongue drips the taste
of her tears.
Sapphires.

Me lying in her room
Escaping childhood~
Holding on.

One pillow holding two cheeks
arms wrapping round
Each other~
Musically.

Oh, to be the wings
that brought us there.

I kiss her sleeping lashes
my hands holding her face
like a jewel
me slipping out of her room
like air.

Perhaps she will never know
the way her
Emerald
watercolour eyes
pour though me
like
liquid
Diamonds
~Still.

The Steps to Montmartre

Roxanne
Duboucheron

I stayed awhile
next to Montmartre one summer
where in the courtyard
dancers' long limbs
flowed like the arms of a garden,
flutes and tambourines
scented the air
gypsy-sweet.

In the late evening
I rested along the apartment railing
and counted the steps to Montmartre,
her white dome an apparition
against Paris night.

In the morning
I climbed the steps,
the greenness of the two grass landings
laying below the wide steps
that wrapped around the cathedral
like ribbon against the brim of a hat,

and I ascended
clinging on to each iron lamppost
as though I might find myself years later
still attached.

How old were you
when cycles of butterflies
measured the reach of trees,
reflected in the growth of rocks.

How old were you
when the calender split apart,
yielded heat and rain,
divided again
in convenient lunar slices.

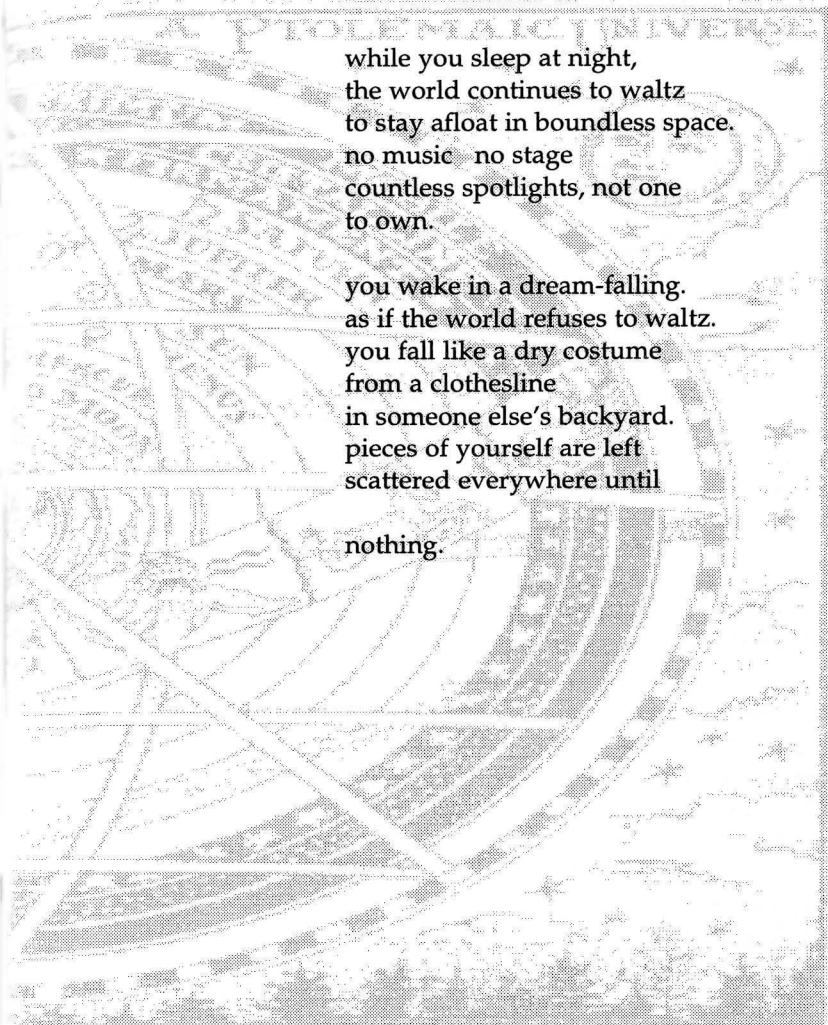
And before that,
when eighty thousand years spanned a life
in the time it took for a strong blade
to sever a silken cable?

How old were you then -- you,
a tiny circle of wind
in layers of wind,
beneath a fragrant ocean,
your descendants already existing
within you, one thousand cubed.

The Waltz

Ernan
Lopez

for Oscar



while you sleep at night,
the world continues to waltz
to stay afloat in boundless space.
no music no stage
countless spotlights, not one
to own.

you wake in a dream-falling.
as if the world refuses to waltz.
you fall like a dry costume
from a clothesline
in someone else's backyard.
pieces of yourself are left
scattered everywhere until
nothing.



Work On What Has Been Spoiled

Julia
Allen

Every time he took the curlers from their hair he felt real calm. Time should stop, he thought. Comb-out came too soon; he would have liked to keep the curls tight and specific forever. To brush through the strength of hair seemed criminal, “the rape of the lock.” But there was no time for segregation. These women wanted to look spontaneous, so he brushed away the evidence of perfections, but not before touching and pulling each springy coil and feeling its determination.

The woman he most often thought about didn’t have curls, natural or otherwise. Her hair was shoulder-length, thick, and inexpensively brown. It was shiny, and sometimes he thought he could detect a slight wave, or maybe it was mere coarseness. Her face was pretty, but plain and serious, and for reasons he wasn’t aware of she sometimes reminded him of the Wicked Witch of the West, even though there was no facial resemblance between the two. It could have been because of a dream he had one morning where he was dancing with the witch—she was only a teenager though, a sober green girl. He felt like kissing her eyelids, but didn’t feel worthy of the honor. For the rest of the day he felt a familiarity between himself and the brown haired girl who waxed and exfoliated people in a back room. She was just as sober as the dream witch.

They said hello and goodbye and how’s it going to each other, but rarely got chatty enough to swap more than vague mutual regard. Sometimes he imagined her in her back room. He liked the thought of her ripping sticky hairs from his eyebrows.

He felt autistic when she stood very near to him—strangely out of touch with human emotions and social courtesies. When she moved away he became Tourettic in his feelings. A surge inside told him to reach out and grab hold. It was a feeling of having hundreds of little

tongues all over his body that could zap out and cling to her. He had to stifle shoulder spasms—turbulence was not appreciated by his clients. So his tics of wanting had learned to move down to his kneecaps, covered by jeans. They jumped and twitched until something distracted him; usually a cowlick that he would get lost examining. His mind followed the strange curve of hair along its infinite road inside the skull. His name was Sam.

And hers was Esther. She was thinking about becoming an alcoholic.

Springtime—Sam laughed and swore on the inside. *Lust in the service industry*, he thought. He slouched in an empty chair and didn't smoke. Slow day. He wondered if he should try talking to her. *It's been almost six months*. He had entertained the thought for a while, but her eyes were so solid; he might just bounce right off and away from her stare. *But I hear the jungle rhythms . . .*

She was in the cafe trying to drink whiskey with orange soda. The soda bubbles tickled her face and brought rare thoughts to her attention. After three sips the waiter stopped gawking, went back to the bar. Esther relaxed her shoulders a bit. The tremble was still inside her though. She pulled her arms closer to her chest, tried to anchor them, feeling she might lose control. *My muscles feel all giggly*, she decided. Like she had just done 20 pushups, but she hadn't. Her lungs shivered as she took another sip and remembered John, her last boyfriend. The man who left her to fulfill his manifest destiny—or in other words, to be a roadie for the Motley Crüe reunion tour. Sure, that was four months ago, but the tour was just now getting to her town. She'd seen an ad in the paper.

Sam finished a small boy's haircut. The kid had a nice neck, Sam admired—the back of it pink and round, tall and smooth. Sam wanted to cup his hand around it and press in. The tendons stretched up so cleanly. Sam's neck felt angry and old. He thought maybe he should let his hair grow longer to cover some of his neck, to warm and shield it.

Esther experimented with the various ways one could swallow fizzy alcohol: heavy gulp, slow; slow, airy slide; sucking through teeth; swish around in the mouth... Her fingers rubbed each other, looking for rough spots to pick at. She saw a dark heaviness in the air, and she laughed silently at the prospect of burping up snorts of whiskey at her next client. *It could be good for business.* It didn't matter anyway—the drink would make her strong and clean. She would march back to work with expert ease and give that girl the arm-waxing of her life, several swift yanks, no do-overs. And then she'd rub scented oil into the tender follicles, rub the tired muscles into life. They would become super-arms. What couldn't they do? She would massage the hands and make the fingers free. Every tendon and muscle would be made light and new, anointed with oil. The whiskey would give her the power to do this. What might wine do? She sipped and watched the arms in her head, saw herself send electric strength into the girl's arms, and saw the energy speed through the rest of the body—think yellow laser beams to the head.

Sam listened uncomfortably to the Shania Twain song that filled the salon. *Why country music?* But curiosity started talking, and louder than the radio. He washed his hands. What bothered him about that girl? He called himself a damn idiot for being so awkward with the situation. He was just gonna have to not care. But she was so silent, at least at work. He couldn't help unloading feelings and mysteries onto her image. Her presence seemed to collect his barely-conscious wishes. Every day they didn't chat he admired her and her deep awareness a little more. *She can understand.* He wanted to break through the tension that had built around him in her presence before they got stuck in permanent isolation—the strange unspoken acknowledgement that there was a barrier between them, an established relationship of noncommunication. He would ask her some questions today.

Esther walked through the doors at 3:00. Her face looked bright. Sam was talking to an old blonde. His head turned to watch the aesthetician. The word felt scientific to him, a

reassuring clinical hardness to match her clear eyes; maybe even a promise of study and experimentation. She looked almost rosy, but subdued. The people made the room noisy with their chatter. His mouth twitched. He wondered if ancestral spirits were laughing and poking at him. But he kept his eyes more or less on the blonde client while she wrapped up her lengthy goodbye. When she finally moved away Sam turned his body to face Esther, who was standing near the entrance and not moving anything but her eyes.

Esther sucked in her breath, holding it for a few seconds before blowing it out. She felt her hips square themselves parallel to the ground. She would take another step soon. But her eyes scanned the tops of the walls, where they turned into ceiling. That was where she should be, her back hovering against the wall up there, held by static electricity, and her head popping through the ceiling. She could float there and watch for her arm wax customer, Mia Goskins, a useless girl who had once been on MTV's horrible Singled Out show, and had ridden a bus from Santa Barbara for the privilege. *And now she's mine*, Esther planned. Those stupid, tired arms would be purged of hair re-growth, and then be filled with purposefulness. She would see to that. Esther had never bothered to think about the girl before. She saw her every month or so, and her attentions remained above the surface. But her whiskey would dig Esther into the girl's soul. She would prepare.

Sam backed into a chair and sat. *Her marrow must be soft.* He could pull it out.

She smiled at him and took large steps toward her room. A few feet before him she felt her keys fall from her hands. *Damn it.* She could feel him watching her. She didn't know how to bend down to get her keys. She hadn't planned on making a mistake. She imagined John the Roadie bending and lifting important things. How could she compete? She shakily knelt down. Her keys were there, but she could still feel Sam watching. Was this his business? She grabbed at the keys, but they fell from her fingers again. She felt like warm rubber. Anxiety.

Sam sat and watched her fumble. He watched her pick up her keys, only to drop them a second later. She did three

times. He grew tense for her. He should go and help, but he didn't move. He watched her sit there motionless on the floor. Her hands had stopped working. He saw her face get red. *Oh, God.* Sam felt the pressure in the room, though no one else had even noticed her there. *Why isn't she moving?* He hoped the sky wouldn't crash down on them.

Ester stopped herself. She didn't feel so good, and she didn't want her keys anymore. She finally struggled to her feet. Sam was looking at her kindly. And her keys were still on the floor. Her body was losing to the world. Her breath caught in her mouth, she felt her stomach screaming at her. *To Hell with Mia Goskins! Why is this man looking at me?* Her inner words stopped, being replaced by ugly pictures. She clumsily ran outside, leaving her keys on the ground.

Sam sat hypnotized in his chair. He waited ten minutes, but she didn't come back. He looked at the bright keys. They looked heavy to him. Slowly he stood, and picked them up. They were still warm. His mind tried to make sense of what had just happened. But he liked her senselessness. He had her keys, and she had to come back some time. She had a client scheduled for later. He knew she was more perfect than he had thought before. He would go outside and find her. ❄

Henka

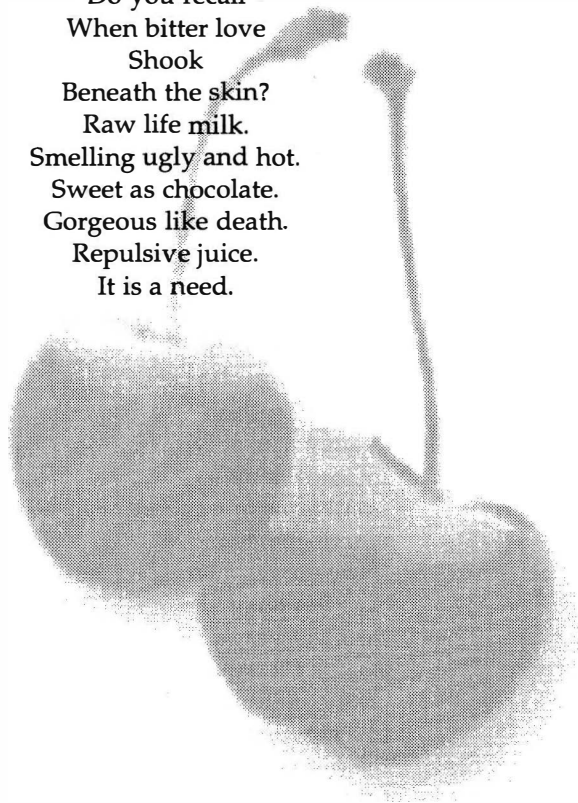
Lyn
Lifshin

With your raspy
gargle of a voice,
always definite
on politics or
news in this
country you say
you can say this.
Polished other
people's floors
in Brooklyn
made blood sausage
until midnight,
wanted the green
that would unroll
like hemlocks in
Banja Luka where
grandmothers shelled
snow peas on break-
ing porches. 50 years
of flesh on flesh
in subways, at 78
she moves up to a
small farm in vermont
where goats nuzzle
snow gloves and
blue iris poke
thru last year's
leaves. I'll dance
on the melting earth
like a gypsy watch
the moon she says
turn rose in the
room of apples, fur
and advent candles

untitled
poem

Salim
Cain

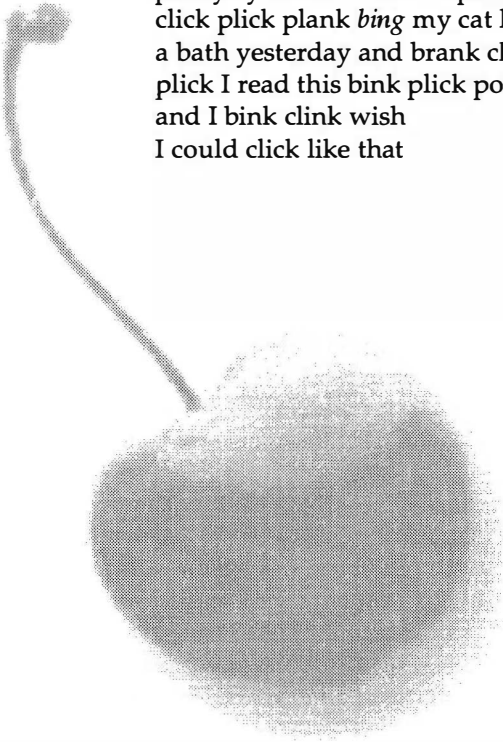
Say,
Do you recall
When bitter love
Shook
Beneath the skin?
Raw life milk.
Smelling ugly and hot.
Sweet as chocolate.
Gorgeous like death.
Repulsive juice.
It is a need.

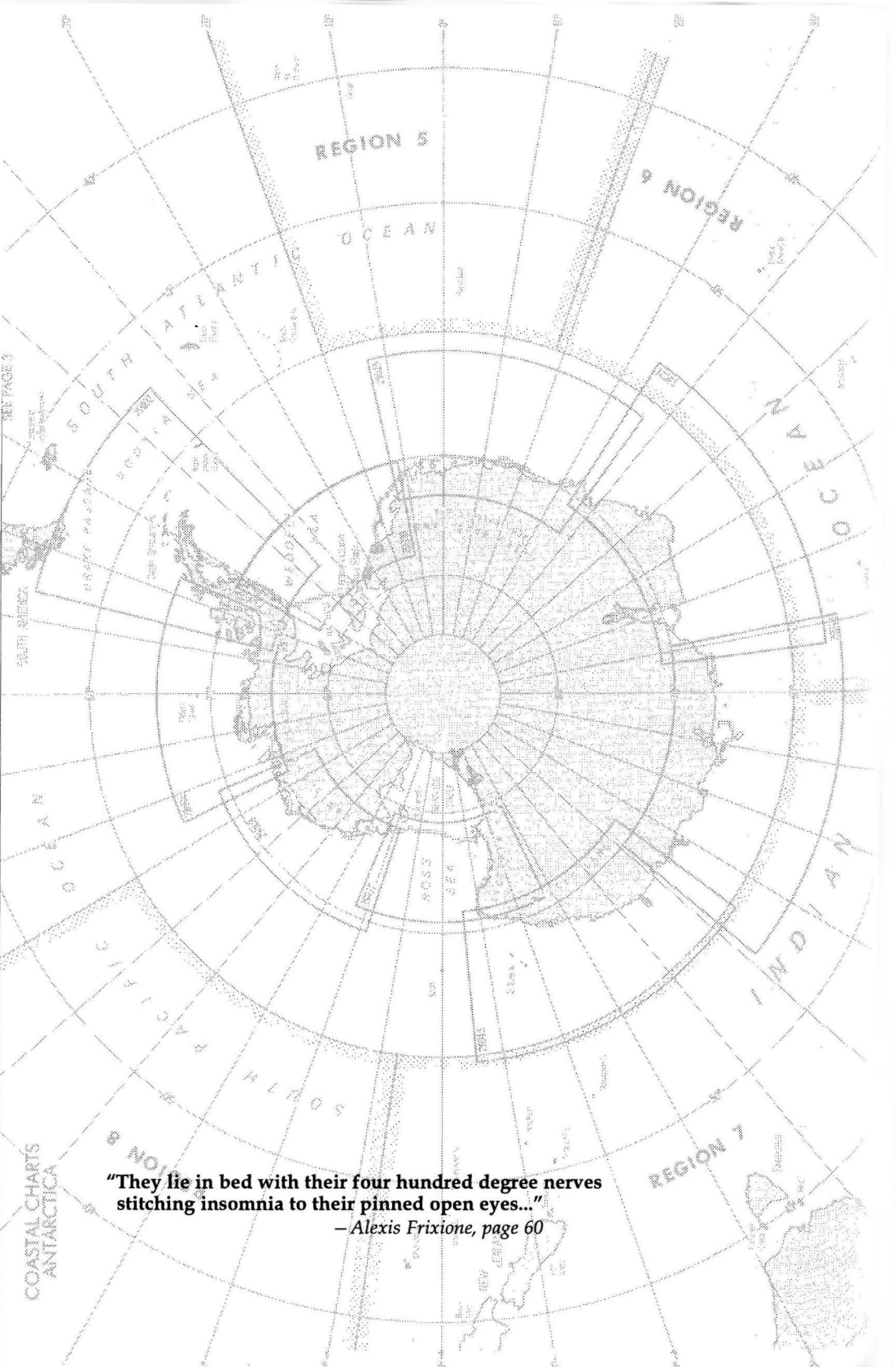


T ypewriter Mouth

Rebecca
Brown

plucks and clicks and yesterday I
went to the mall clank my boy
friend gave me a purple bracelet
click plicky plank frogs in, like,
plick Costa Rica eat other click
clink crank I think he has really
pretty eyes chank burr rupture
click plick plank *bing* my cat had
a bath yesterday and brank clank
plick I read this bink plick poem
and I bink clink wish
I could click like that





"They lie in bed with their four hundred degree nerves stitching insomnia to their pinned open eyes..."

—Alexis Frixione, page 60

A English Teacher in the Gulag

John
Crust

Cold, frustrated, and cold. I sat hunched in a shiver, sitting with my Albanian colleagues in the teachers lounge, this barren, dungeon-like concrete room with a scatter of rickety stools. Heavily bundled in jackets, scarfs, mitts, we shook in this wretched January freeze, puffs of breath trailing our brittle words. We huddled around the wood stove, waiting, waiting anxiously, while someone tried to get a morning fire going. It was just short of 8 o'clock.

"They don't study, they don't listen to a word I say..." My arms were folded and pressed firmly against my chest, an attempt to compress my body heat into some underlay of warmth.

"I know," said Kadira, my counterpart, the Albanian English teacher. She sat next to me, flustered, too.

"They never have pens. No books. Nothing."

"Yes, they are horrible."

"I don't know what to do." I sometimes left class ready to cry, this feeling of . . . of what the hell was I doing here, I'm wasting my time. They didn't care, they didn't want to listen, they couldn't be bothered. It bordered on a fuck-you attitude. I knew this really wasn't true, but it certainly came across that way. As I did my best to keep some realm of a lesson moving along, everyone would break off into loud splinters of Albanian conferences, turning away, laughing, joking, their chatter gaining in depth and magnitude, tuning me out as some irritating interruption. "I just—"

"You cannot do anything," Kadira said.

A fire began to kindle in the stove. The teachers closed in around it, with a few more bodies gradually squeezing in, hands outstretched, anxious for a little warmth. Kadira and I sat crushed in the middle of this, conversing in English, a rabble of Albanian pleasantries and exchanges surrounding us.

"Ftohtë!"

"Good moourning . . . you have cold . . .?"

I nodded politely, propping up a tired smile, orchestrating little breakoffs of Albanian and English, while listening to Kadira. "They are bad pupils," she said, her face wrinkled in melancholy. "They don't know anything. They don't want to know anything."

"But it wasn't like this before the revolution . . ."

"Oh, no. Never." Her voice seemed to rise up with a tinge of regret. The little I knew and understood about the past was quite frightening. The political prisoners, people incarcerated for the littlest offense: A complaint about the food, or lack there of. There was the story of the young singer who languished in prison for singing "Let It Be." Anything emanating religion — churches, cemeteries — systematically closed, destroyed. A complaint, a hint of opposition, and you were an enemy of the state, arrested, taken care of. If your shirt was white, a friend put it simply, and the Party said it's black, you better believe it's black. "They wouldn't dare come to school without books and pens."

"So — so why don't they have books and pens now?"

"They have freedom. They think they can do what they want."

"But they can't do what they want. That is not democracy. It's — anarchy."

Kadira shrugged. "You must understand we're still—"

"I know, I know . . . A transition period."

On any given day, I would venture out, looking, watching, absorbing the sights and manners of Albania and this transition period. It was not unusual to see a ragged old horse harnessed to a wood cart, hauling a sparkling new white satellite dish. Along the road, crumbling walls marked with the faded broken exclamations of the Party, and, everywhere, the harsh landmarks those once-mighty exclamations generated: mushroom-shaped bunkers, hundreds of thousands of them, a schizophrenic dictator's preparation to thwart the imaginary invasions that never came. Playing about the bunkers, children sporting Chicago Bulls jackets and Michael Jackson T-shirts yelled and

screamed, laughing and chasing one another in the mud-thick streets, often nibbling pastries and other snacks loosely wrapped in the pages of the late dictator's Marxist-Leninist outcries.

There were the boys — eight, nine, perhaps as old as eleven — calling out to me. When I turned, to flash a smile, to say hello, a middle finger was thrust up into the air, flipping me off. Their elders didn't know the ways of the outside world, but the kids knew I understood very well. They loved it, this clandestine dialogue they shared. The parents admired me, having such a way with kids, this playful American magnetism that drew them all to me. The little shits . . . I wanted to break their fuckin' fingers.

I was brought here to teach English at the local gjymnazi, the Albanian equivalent to a high school, though it felt more like something out of Solzhenitsyn's gulag. The town was remote, and far, an outpost hidden in the rugged hinterlands where the Alps begin to rise into majestic peaks and inclines that form the northern reaches of Albania. They gave me my own classroom, the best in the school, they said. The Albanian teachers were so honored, grinning in a gracious timidity. Only the very best for the American teacher. And as I smiled modestly, a little embarrassed, insisting, really, I don't want any special treatment, I was escorted quietly into my room: no light fixtures, no electrical outlets. All that remained were the twisted, uprooted wire ends sticking out of the walls and ceiling. Half the window panes lay shattered on the ground outside. The blackboard was punctured and smashed. The desks were wobbling patchworks of nailed splinters. It was suggested they'd likely wobble more by mid-winter, as they'd be stripped further to fuel the wood stove. I should be weary of this and try to prevent it. I nodded, oh, okay, alright, not quite sure what else to say. The mangled rusted heap in the corner was the wood stove. You look worried, they laughed, don't worry! — the wood stove will be refitted by winter. Oh, okay. The tabletop to the teacher's desk was punched in, giving me easy access to the drawer without having to pull the drawer out.

They then apologized, somewhat ashamed, saying the kids' English was . . . uh, well, not very good. I nodded

some more. No problem. That's what I'm here for, to make their English better. English, as the aid administrators explained, is the language of the business world, the written texts of new technologies, medical science, exchanges in development and investment. I knew it would be challenging, but I couldn't imagine a more rewarding experience — helping these poor victims of Stalinism. And so, from that day on, I made a concerted effort to be understanding, compassionate, sensitive to these trying times, conscious of everything they'd been through, taking all this into consideration when I heard kids came to school with knives, guns, grenades, sticks of dynamite. Again and again, frightened teachers would scream about the dangers freedom had nurtured. Twice, the Russian-language teacher's classroom thundered in an explosion, both times the little old woman scurrying out in a cry. *Komunist* . . . adolescent whispers hissed. "Not a very popular subject anymore," the foreign languages inspector shrugged, a Turkish coffee and incessant shot glasses of raki pushed at me. "A transition period," he nodded, "a very difficult time for our young people."

I agreed. It had to be especially difficult for the kids. At home, newly-acquired stereos extracted rhythms and beats from cheap counterfeit cassettes of Pearl Jam, Nirvana, Michael Jackson. When they could, when a parent wasn't around pushing for the melancholic redundant whine of Albanian folk music, the kids taught themselves dance steps, studying the appropriate moves to heavy metal, grunge, rock, and rap. Fack oof! they shouted joyously in new-found bravado. They sat entranced, smiling at pictures of foreign lands — computers, fast cars, music videos — flicking channel after channel, back and forth, up and down the number scale, in search of heavier doses. In English, Italian, German, French, Polish. Always happy pictures, wonderful things. Look, look! Look at that! they laughed. Ah, how the outside world flaunted her face, and everything else, too. Teasing, enticing, relentless arousals. America . . . they fantasized. You could do anything in America. Then, each morning, they trudged over to the gulag.

A teacher hurried and disappeared into the dark corridor, her arm shaking the cowbell into a clanging echo. Young shapes emerged, then blurred, then emerged again from the dark, screaming, whistling, hooting in a tumultuous movement, pushing, pulling, squeezing toward kicked-in, splintered doors. The sharp shatter and crash of glass, for an instant, cut off all other noise, but registered little thought. I forged through, exchanging greetings, hello, good morning, good morning. Metallica, Mega death, Fuck oof, I wants seks, Disco klub, rough-lettered in crude scrawls, lay amid Albanian outbursts decorating the walls. I tried to smile: Some realm of English was practiced outside of class. I pushed forward, fighting a crosscurrent of adolescent Albanian rabble, finally reaching my classroom.

Besim dangled from the ceiling, hanging from a noose shaped from uprooted wiring that once fed a light. Dritan singing, Edi dancing, Arber darting in and out of the room, Hektor burning a desk. Hektor put the fire out . . . Yahs. Arben and Gezim moved stools from one end of the room to the other. Dritan hurled a stool across the room, crashing hard, motioning angrily about a smudge on the seat. I go out one minute. Anila, yelling. I no feeling good. Klodi. I going hospital, but no absent. Klodi again. Laureta and Rovena, faces playing up concern over her health, need to escort her. Altin, Albert, Gentian, and Taulant in the corner got into a card game. Put the cards away . . . One mee-noot. Spartak motioned he can fix the wood stove, banging and clanging at the rusted fragmentation, still crumpled in a mangled heap. Anila ran back in, Besim scurried out. Besim! One mee-noot. You guys, we have to get— Spartak's banging at the stove gained force. Spartak, don't worry about — Ftohtë! I know it's cold, I'm sorry, but — The door swung open, three young toughs bellowing, wild laughter and shouts fermented by alcohol: Arben! çfarë bën! si dukesh . . . Arben shouting back, Anglisht! They gestured at me. Arben, mee-noot, pleez . . . Dritan and Edi hollered a conversation out the window. Albert and Gentian hurried to join in. Where are pictures which that was on wall? Ardita. The hollers lobbed out the window escalated. Someone took — put the Albanian books away! Eglantina and Floreta eyed me nervously, promptly slipping biology

texts out of sight. Arnita finished scribbling out a page. Here composition of Edi. But you wrote it, refusing to take it. Only help. Okay you guys! please! sit down! The door banged open again. Gezim! Si dukesh! The door slammed shut. Who has books? One hand wavered faintly. Ftohtë! Englantina, shivering. I know it's cold, I'm sorry. What is! — and Gezim jumped up, anxious to ask, You know what is horny? Yes, do you — Mischievous laughter. The door burst open. Edi! a je mirë! Two mee-noot. No! The anger's building, the frustration mounting. Pleez, prohblehm. No! slamming the door shut. You guys . . . ! trying to stay calm, trying to push ahead. Pushoni, ju lutem, quiet, please! Ftohtë! Put the cards away, put the newspaper — No, no, one mee-noot . . .

That's it, that's—

"HEY!!!—" fuckin' losing it. "This is bullshit! When you guys want to learn I'll come back!" I stormed out, a raucous applause, magnified by cheers and laughter, following my exit.

I pranced through the emptied corridor in a mad rush, burning, I don't need to take this . . . bumping right into the school director. Formally addressed as Drejtoresha, I preferred to think of her as Frau Stalin, this hard-faced, broad-shouldered, self-imposing obstruction. She held a stiff dictatorial stance at the gulag, locked in a rigid Marxist-Leninist do-nothing kind of initiative, scorned by a frustrated youth recklessly inebriated on MTV sass. She thoroughly distrusted me. Once, as the teachers sat scrunched about her desk in a meeting, Frau demanded what I thought of their school. With Kadira nervously translating, I suggested that, well, maybe the, uh, school administration was making too many decisions for the kids, that it might help if a kind of democratic student government was set up. Let the kids bear responsibility for some things. The kids needed more social activities than an Albanian poetry reading at the Palace of Culture. It's a transition period! she snapped hard, they're not ready for such things! Then she charged into what unquestionably had to be an American's ulterior motive here. Gathering information! She smirked at me, smiling an I-know-better smile. Ah, she knew, her head moving to a rambling spew of Albanian, her finger point-

ing, shaking. You always asking questions, why things were the way they were, why they are the way they are. The whispered suspicion I might be on the CIA payroll persisted. I did my best to ignore her, to simply avoid her.

Now, Frau Stalin eyed me sharply in the corridor, giving off one of those downcast Brezhnev stares, hands gesturing: What's going on? Shit, just my luck, she'd start clamoring I'm filing some report to Washington. Trying not to sound too much like a mentally-deficient idiot, I stutted, stammered, and slurred my way through a jabber of Albanian, every other word or so repeated two, three, four times, as I desperately searched for the next word I needed to explain the situation. Frau maintained this unsympathetic glare, a hard steadfast frown intimating my terribly-inept Albanian surely had to be a careful ploy, a ruse. She hesitated, seemingly scrutinizing my nervousness — I was always nervous around her; everyone was — then she quickly motioned me back to the classroom.

The party atmosphere shriveled to a dead stillness once the kids spotted Frau Stalin's march behind me. With a collective scrape of their stools, the kids shot up from their seats, rigid at attention. She immediately tore into them, reaming them, her hands moving here, there, pointing, shaking, the severity of her words fiercely cut, shaped, sharpened by the wave and swing of her hands. Ooh, yes, Frau! You tell 'em! I fought the smile pushing up to pop free. But the quivering undercurrent of enjoyment dissipated rather quickly. I watched as Frau went on and on and on, really balling the shit out of them, assailing them in a bellow of wretched screams. And I saw it: the monster lurking under her brow, harnessed, anxious to be unleashed once more. There was something in Frau Stalin's tone, in that demeanor, a frightening viciousness, an insidiousness, which, for the moment anyway, pummeled these kids into silence, a kind of silence I had not seen before. The sledgehammer effect of nailing them into submission really disturbed me. The tirade held something of a threat, a fear. Not a verbal threat per se. A much greater threat. The threat of going back to something I could probably never imagine. I knew then that I would not quit, that I absolutely could not quit.

Frau Stalin came to a dramatic, hard-hitting finale. She turned to me in an about-face, just short of a salute, huffed some Albanian dictate, and marched off. Immediately, I motioned the kids to sit down. "Okay you guys . . ." I began slowly, diplomatically, pushing up a half-smile. And so we tried again, this insane notion of an English class in a refrigerator/freezer. In the corner, Spartak worked at reassembling the rusted heap into something of a wood stove, this time in a much less grating manner. *

1 In Praise of Ketchup

Nancy
Thompson

Sometimes I wish
I could cover the world
with candy red,
ridiculous red,
and sticky sweetness
for at least a day —
squeeze a stripe
of diner happiness
into thick red smiles.

Long ago, I ribboned hot dogs,
eggs and fries, slathered
Friday's fish sticks, stirred pink
into pastina, mashed it
into mashed potatoes —

spread it everywhere.
The Disneyland
of food — a moment's
plastic pleasure —
where tomatoes turn to frauds,
spurn their vegetable nature.

Try to free
the genie from its bottle —
stubborn, reluctant,
then *ploof!* it's out —
granting our wishes
in threefold globs,
which is magically
just enough.

A historical Treatise

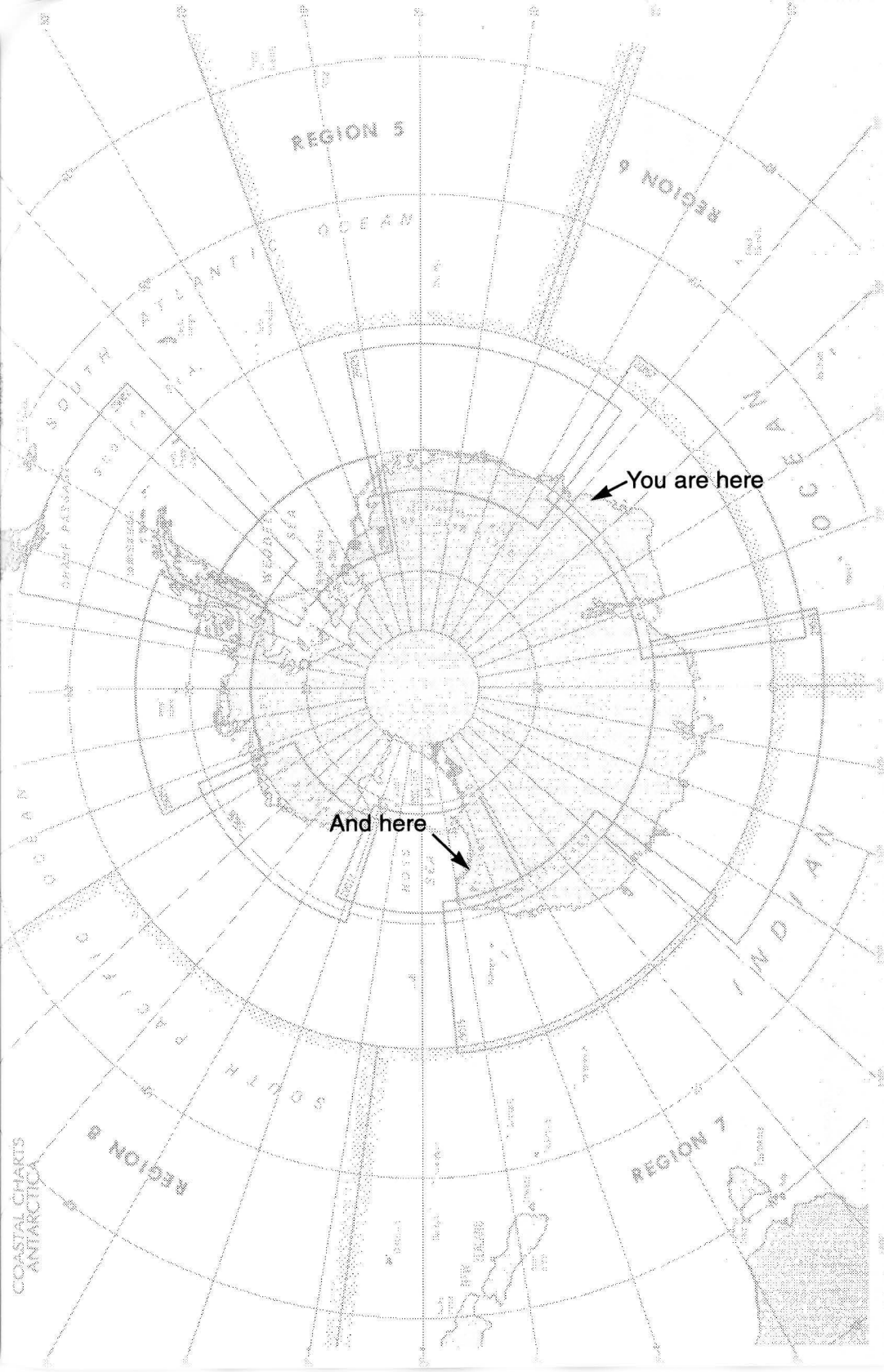
Charles Jason
Foster

1926
Brains in a skillet
Fried up fireman
Cow stumbling hooves
Have no
Take three and
Trip over the television
I walked and ran
Into
A wall
Like garlic juice
Dripping fluidly
Then upon a cliff
Dog day
Drag body
Dead
Wonder and marvel
At
Look where the sun sets
Slippery
Water-based
Fall drowning
It took some time but
My fork broke the wall
Into
A wall
Diving
Brick
Look where the dime stops
Sliding
Now
Make
Something

1 It's a Boy

Charles Jason
Foster

My twitch ate dinner
Spamicide jelly
On squid-roll jelly bean
Octopus
Egg legs took a filibuster
I slipped on sewer rat pie
Banana
Banana
Banana
Salamander
Sickly-sweet succotash smoldering suffering sassafras sapphire
Fish
Is that your arm
Or is there a
Hippopotamus in the sewer
San Fran
 Silly goat
 Silly goat
 Silly goat
 Silly goat
Billy goat nanny goat
Ra-ra-ra
Give a gander
Goose bump
Ha-ha-ha
Eat it with cheese
Juggle with ease
Dance like a freight train
My cows please



REGION 5

REGION 6

SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

INDIAN OCEAN

You are here

And here

REGION 8

REGION 7

COASTAL CHARTS ANTARCTICA

SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN

SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

DRIFTFIELD

NEW ZEALAND

ANTARCTICA

A round Here

j julie

I'm not from around here. And even if I was I'd still look like this. I'd still wander into coffee shops hating cappuccinos, lattes, hating the bitterness, the aftertaste, the smell of vanilla cherry syrup on the floor with seltzer water and some wandering lost artist who'd rather sit in here reading poetry, playing her acoustic guitar on a Friday night instead of disappearing into some club for dancing and an anonymous fast fuck around the corner. This is what I think about: drugs, coffee houses, and my generation of alternative rockers. I swallow. Sometimes I just need this space and other times I think what the hell am I doing, are we doing around here.

I sat next to her about a hundred times before. Smelling her. Watching. I guess I just never realized it before because all we had ever really done was talk. For hours. And hours about everything. Sometimes she would mention her girlfriend but, "Really," she would say, "it's over." It's over now for about a year and we were hanging out just talking. We played checkers at the coffee house till one am last week. Before that it was jigsaw puzzles. And before that we used colored markers on paper till we began body art and when that happened I looked into her eyes at the very same moment she looked at mine and noticed that her eyes were brown. Brown like the #59 on paper but far from that color when she inked it on my arm. She drew a praying mantis on my calf which seems unusual, I know, but she was a very good artist. This made up for the fact that I don't much care for certain kinds of bugs.

I bought a coffee, threw it down in a soft swirl across the table from where she sat studying the black and red of the checker board. Checker boards switching to cards, avoiding trivial pursuit like chess, too high on the game chain, and I couldn't stand the thought of another conversation without reason even though I was happy just being there, just talking like we had done in ritual every

Monday, every Tuesday Thursday minus the weekends when we pretended to not know each other. We lead other lives.

My coffee still swirled on the table and her eyes seemed different when I look at them. Brown and still soft but asking questions she hadn't tried before. "You don't know what you want, do you?" and I sipped my coffee just staring back remembering I had forgotten the sugar, the cream for my coffee, just wanting everything to be not the things I wanted.

There are certain things I know and when I leaned in close to answer I put down my cards on the table pushing a pattern of checkers in a form unknown to the game, where instead of kings in columns of two, one red one black, they all sat side by side in a not so circular triangle and every piece on the table was touching every other piece was no longer face to face but slightly pushed up so some corners lay nearly open, arousingly turned up and leaning, but touching. I leaned over kissing, through her shirt, her light nipple. I put my hand on her torn denim at the knee so I could hear her breathing, feel softer skin than I had thought. The muscles in her stomach, firm, relaxed in her exhale inviting my lips there too. She must have known that at that moment I would have said anything, told her any deep dark secret I had concealed in our hours spent in conversation, hours spent in story. She must have known for she looked at me next to the checkers next to my coffee getting cold, scrunched up in the corner, a ball between the table and her lap, and she said, "This is what I want."

I began to smile until I realized the extent of the "this" that she wanted. She wanted more ink on skin, Saturdays, and an answer to her question: "How is it that you ended up here?" And I tried to push out from this curl, reclaim my space, rearrange the checker board with spilled coffee, ink dripping to soak the napkin, soak the game with the parts I never intended to reveal. For this time I must resist all that is autobiographical. All I want to tell is a story, that perfect fantasy story, that trashy romance, that crazy road trip where I suddenly find myself driving a Greyhound bus headed east. I excuse all of the passengers at the first depot announcing it is the last and final destination. Two elderly

people are the last to disembark from the luxury liner and in my kind and polite manner I offer to help with their luggage by loaning them my travel sack with wheels. As they stand by the side of the road near both a Coke and a Pepsi machine, they take out five coins only to become dumbfounded, having forgotten addition, the value of a dime, and which cola won the last taste test. I, with a certain squeal of the tires which has left a dust trail swirling around the shack of a bus stop where the other 45 people have been convinced they were dropped in Boulder, Colorado because their tickets tell them that and John Denver is crackling from a broken speaker on the porch, know that another minute at the side of the road would mean a six minute delay at the next stoplight, for this, would halt the progression of the story.

Instead, three stoplights later, the light inevitably does turn red whereby I do bring the 40 foot vehicle to a grinding halt. Sitting there, I am unable to contemplate whether to turn left or right. To the left is an unmarked dirt plain, the contour of which seems rather rough and bumpy. Normally a route of this kind would be bold, adventurous, "To go where no man has gone before," but in my simple gesture of kindness to the elderly, that moment where all previous passion for a road trip wells up into a long and dusty, windy road, and the basic desire for lemonade, I realized I had left my bras in my travel sack with wheels.

To the right: A cliff. And seemingly so, for a tactic so widely used would be the possibility of the greyhound plunging over the side, or at least the suspense building up to that point where even I would, in an instant, see my life flash before my eyes as the wheels came dangerously close to the edge not once but twice before losing their grip. In a continuous, swooping slow motion act, the bus would dive turning head first, and, slamming into a large boulder, would tumble gloriously and burst into flames in a spectacular 40 gallon-size diesel explosion. KA BOOM!

That won't happen. I do not tell action packed, special effects stories. There are no heroes and villains, no gun battles or street chases. This is a story about life and love, about buses and long tedious hours of driving, about communication and solidarity. This is a story about dust.

I stared at the silhouette, silver band with the turquoise stone from a bench carved tree stump in Arizona. In Arizona I felt small standing next to some welcome sign in a picture painted pink sky with my mother. We were showing off our muscles. My mother's strength came from an off green tank top with spaghetti straps she wore in that June sunlight and tight but bell bottom jeans. That and her now smoky ash blonde hair minus dark brown roots. Minus the soil she dragged from apartment to apartment and into a Winnebago headed past the lights and glory of Las Vegas straight to Arizona one night. She was supposed to be famous, I thought, but left her chance soaking too long in a tie-dye bucket overnight.

She left fame to the brassy head photographer who showed up weekends and Wednesdays for sloppy tennis at the junior college and picnics at the kiddie park, just me, mom and our beagle, his little red MG, the top down, radio blasting Cat Stevens in acoustic love.

"But it wasn't love," she tried to explain and began washing the perfect colors back to plain white T-shirts to stack in a suitcase torn duffel bag. The red blue green purple yellow stained cement buckets and a heap of soda ash by the door paved their way to the rock pressed pool deck in search of something less dry and I sat watching. I sat and spooned chocolate pudding down the drain attachment on the Sparkletts dispenser.

"Chocolate pudding isn't love." Or maybe it is when you're four years old because soon after the Sparkletts dispenser was to be removed from our home the Winnebago would arrive. My mother would no longer buy chocolate pudding cups, instead she switched to tapioca. Tapioca has always been one of the ten great mysteries for me. The experience of eating those beady little bits offers great insight to the practice of contemplation. For example, what is tapioca? Where does it come from? Does it grow on trees or sprout from the ground? Is pudding the only use for tapioca?

The answers don't usually appear by the time the whole four ounces of pudding is consumed and my contemplation is settled by the digestion process. Except sometimes I begin to wonder about that man, the Indian,

beast, on the side of the road who sold my mother her turquoise ring from his black briefcase and some empty stare at an unopened package of Del Monte tapioca pudding cups pushed up against the side window of the Winnebago. His fingernails were thick, his skin, his eyes dark like my hair and I looked for his horse, his bow and arrow, some kind of feather headdress to go along with his moccasins and beads. I expected him to hold one hand high in a gesture of peace and waited to hear his voice, but nothing, I remember he said nothing.

Perhaps the traffic on the canyon road forbade us from eye contact and my mother in her now beaming beauty forgot about the episodes of Lone Ranger we had watched together in her bed on rainy days with orange juice and ginger ale, a roll of salami and a knife. Our midnight snack shared in secrecy. The lightning came down one time in a storm, struck the bedroom window in a flash of red and maybe yellow. The pane shook and rattled the walls in a flight of adrenaline that proved comfort, to my mother, was merely the presence of another body, me, and the Downy softness emitted from freshly washed sheets. "Nobody can take away the moments," and she kissed my cheek.

She kissed my cheek and pulled my arm to make sure I stayed out of traffic and the indian, he closed his briefcase and headed for the overhang at the only gas station for fifty miles, which at this point in the canyon was right behind us. My mother also headed toward the overhang and into the small shop to see if she could find lemonade or even iced tea but something to cool the back of her throat and a bag of potato chips. The best food on a road trip is that trashy squishy white bread with Miracle Whip, a Kraft single, and thin sliced processed lunch meat from a package. It's fast, easy, reliable. I don't remember such enthusiasm from my mother who, after only two days of the same sandwich sought out soups, more salad, and rain. I saw my mother pray for rain.

In her noble exchange with the indian I had failed to see my mother's connection to him until then. Her beaming beauty and her ring, the only obvious signs of enlightenment to me. Somewhere along her path back to the Winnebago to change the eight track to Crosby Stills

and Nash, my mother dropped to her knees and opened her mouth to the sky pouring sun sweetened lemon water in a single thunderous roar. And somewhere unfolded a piece of my mother I knew was being drowned out but the noise of the cars stopping, people running to the other side of the street to see the canyon in its wetness.

I stood in rain soaked rubber boots. The door to the Winnebago shut tight, I grew anxious, realizing that the indian stood by himself looking straight ahead, realizing that my only opportunity to share with him something sacred as well, was maybe a tapioca pudding cup tucked in that paper sack by the window. But in my experience with sharing pudding cups I always revert back to how much I loved to drink Sparkletts water from the big white dispenser in the kitchen corner and longing for the return to my home, flashed upon the stains of chocolate as the thing was loaded onto a giant green truck heading east to Oklahoma.

Oklahoma is not something I remember, not a place I have traveled extensively to. Oklahoma is not a part of me. Not a part of me like the auburn of Utah, the red of New Mexico. Our Winnebago fluctuated between rocks and street corners between mucky motel swimming pools to cool our feet begging my mother to bare herself to the sun, to flip through pages of magazines in a daydream. My mother was tempted by the ads, carried Coppertone in her bag, drank Perrier with a twist of lime to wash it all away with bubbles, curing the itch of the dry dry air. She liked the seasons in New Mexico, liked the smell of every flower blooming yellow in her mind. Picking flowers, rocks from the ground to put in her pouch my mother found my little black stuffed bear, Bumbles, purchased in the novelty shop next to Hoagan's Liquor, next to a man dying in a sleeping bag on the sidewalk, my bear coming apart at the seam. His body ripped underneath his left leg near his belly and the stuffing came seeping out like I was nourishing the birds with the insides of my bear flying overhead, scattered and scared. Their wings, their flying must have sounded like flames because the green of my mother's eyes turned hot and she could no longer find her sewing kit through the smoke gathering in the sky, could no longer find her place in this state.

We left the Winnebago by that exact spot on the road my mother stopped to touch the totem carved in another tree stump, drove to the beach on Sundays in a convertible navy Corvair my mother bought with fancy tires and hairdos. We drove fast into the wind with my mother's hair blowing in a kite tail waft and the ribbon she used to contain it on the front seat next to me. Men in Porsches would stare and my mother's destination would still be sand and ocean mist air to fill her lungs instead of cigarettes for one day. One day of the week and a different picnic basket cooler, two peaches, egg salad sandwiches, and an Oreo cookie for dessert. It is difficult to hold half an Oreo cookie in each hand while building sand castles near the waves. The parts of cookie I dropped my mother would pick up and incorporate into the castle. "The gems are the most important part" and she stuck a sliver of dark brown Oreo ruby round into the sidewall of our castle. And we built a moat. We built a moat and every time the water came cold and up to the front, the sand wall would disappear under the whitewash, the cavern dug so carefully would fill its void space with a tangible something though not solid, and I would hold my breath and my mother's bare leg afraid for the castle, afraid that it could somehow wash the time it took to move the sand back into the ocean with it and I would have to run into its rage and reclaim what I had lost. But when the water slid back and our castle still stood there my mother smiled swinging me in a circle and I was no longer holding my breath.

Our castle was smooth from the water, my mother admiring its newness and ready to grab our plastic bucket, fill it again with grainy sand. She walked downhill toward deeper water and scooped the bucket in, capturing a piece of fierceness so I could look at it carefully. Inside the water was clear. I could see to the bottom, sand she had gathered settled, camouflaging the bucket's redness. "This," she said, "is another world." And she reached her hand down into the sand, her turquoise ring emerged, pulled out a small silver creature and rinsed it so it shined and stayed mesmerized in her hand until she gave it to me. No longer feeling the warmness of my mother's hand, it jumped back to the safety of the water. And I felt cold standing, soaking

wet and windy.

When we turned back to the blanket the sand stuck to our feet making them heavier and my mother took my hand to keep me warm walking over to kiss our castle good-bye. I reached down and looking hard noticed a pattern of footprints—disregard for the lines that silently said No Trespassing—that screamed inside my own head. I don't know if my mother realized the set of footprints trampled through our castle, my tears, because we left the beach, driven out by severities other than the weather, and I had to walk. Walk back to the car myself to wear the sticky sand from my feet and carry my towel soft and close to my face, missing the day.

There are other things that I miss as well. The sound of the corvair, the wind, my mother driving up to some place wooden, some place not far from the beach, and I could still smell the ocean. Salt water tanks filled the walls in rows like bigger buckets my mother collected and instead of the shrimp, the lobster hovered in the corner, she ordered clam chowder served hot in a bread bowl to share. In my mother's voice, she looked like this shrimp house, this dump of a cafe just wasn't enough, that the greasy patty melt smell was overbearing, perfuming the ocean she came here for with a stench reminding her that her green eyes were only a reflection of something sweet to me, only a way of looking at me while she thought out loud "North to one of the Dakotas or maybe Minnesota."

Minnesota is my favorite state, partly because I have never been there. I've been to all the others or at least I know people who grew up on cheese farms in Wisconsin and people who still do live in Indiana, who know everyone in their small town and K-mart makes them smile. K-mart was never enough for my mother.

My mother believed in things like the turquoise ring she kissed before putting it on her finger everyday for fifteen years, before setting it in my hand and running to the rest room like it wasn't ok to have this moment, "At least not here, not around here," she said and I received restaurant tapioca, the can, the lid non existent, whipped cream on the top and I wanted to like it, it tasted good, wanted to switch back to chocolate.

It really isn't chocolate pudding at all, I think, but something. I don't know what. We tried Pennsylvania in the snow and even Colorado, the place at the four corners of the map where my tiny body fit neatly in different states at the same time. I thought my mother would travel back to New York, back to the spot on my grandparents' map where the ground became more solid to them and the places they found to keep their china were far from the journey my mother took to be born here, in Los Angeles.

It's not our Winnebago that I miss, but the lack of a certain place to stick a Sparkletts water dispenser, a small silver and turquoise ring. It is the indian. It is Chocolate pudding. It is more so tapioca because tapioca is now what I know, what I love. And tapioca isn't love either.

It isn't sitting in coffee houses till one am, caffeine highs, cigarette smoke, my ass sprawled out across the checker board, two copies of the New Yorker nobody is reading beneath me, wrinkled. The glare, that rhythm blowing hot steamy air into milk kept in the refrigerator and I'm pushing down, fear, flies and follows me around, lands softly, thick coats of dust on the table. Her bare belly pressed against mine in a heated moment of damp damp sweat and THAT being the only thing left to drink in this entire joint. I reach down touching her jeans making the holes bigger, her knees barer. I smell coffee on her breath as I continue to kiss her, continue to accost the shape of her body in touch for the first time since conversation, the first time since she spoke. It is brown eyes far from the comfort of my mother's green that I face and that still begging question. "You don't know what you want, do you?"

And I think to myself yes, yes I do. I want to forget. I want to be strong. I want to be back in my clown pajamas with feet. I want to feel you asking questions, knowing I haven't any answers, remembering I left my mother standing in the doorwell of a Greyhound bus bound north of this city, north of the pain and empty glory, north of all the dust around here. #

22



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