Spring 1995

Cover art, *Aquatic Dreamer*, by Kristen Evans

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ICON is the student-run and student-operated literary magazine of Kent State University Trumbull Campus. ICON is published twice yearly: at the end of Fall and Spring semesters.

The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the editors or Kent State University Trumbull Campus.

Subscriptions: ICON is available free of charge to Kent State University Trumbull Campus students, staff, and faculty. Those off campus may purchase individual copies of ICON for $3.00, or subscribe for $6.00/year (2 issues).

Submissions: ICON considers submissions of unpublished short stories, poems, essays, and black and white art. We read manuscripts and evaluate art work from September 1 to March 1 of each year. All manuscripts and art work should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Direct all correspondence to ICON, c/o Dr. Robert Brown, Kent State University, Trumbull Campus, 4314 Mahoning Ave. NW, Warren, OH 44483.
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### CONTENTS

#### HART CRANE MEMORIAL POETRY AWARD

Carol E. Miller  ... Noise .................................. 1

#### POETRY

Gigi Danko  ... 501 ........................................ 3
  Discovery .................................................. 4
Phyllis Lomax Martin  ... Little One So Dear to Me  ... 5
  Survivor .................................................. 7
Kristen Evans  ... Midnight Magic ......................... 9
Walter Bargen  ... Spaghetti Western ...................... 10
James Hrusovsky  ... Today, ............................... 19
  Wider Dreams of Silence .............................. 20
Peggy Sue Byrnes  ... They Come Wanting .................. 21
  Winter Poem Warning ................................. 24
Janis Rice  ... Passion .................................. 27
  The Blue and the Grey ............................... 28
Erin Larsen  ... Realization .............................. 29
Jessica Sklar  ... Traveling the Blue Route ............... 32
Barbara Campbell  ... The Painted Vase ................. 36
Sharon Norman  ... "Untitled" ........................... 38
  "Untitled" ............................................... 39
Ron Book  ... I Remember the Little Things .......... 40
  Every Morning I Feel Good .......................... 41
G. Timothy Gordon  ... Naming the Night .............. 50

#### PROSE

Joseph M. Dudley  ... Real Life With Aliens ............. 11
Gary Baker  ... Pederasty: Intimacy Between  ......... 25
  A Man and a Boy ..................................... 25
James Carlson  ... Legacies ................................ 34
Ron Book  ... Carl, His Microphone ........................ 43
  and Marbel ............................................. 43

#### HART CRANE MEMORIAL POETRY AWARD

**CAROL E. MILLER**

**Noise**

At dusk, cicadas launch their loudest, last harangue against the sun, weird as sitars blowing out amps. Traffic rushes in to fill the lapse, and night falls in a screech of brakes at the changing light. If there are stars, they don't shine here. The alley leaps into relief, kicking over a generator. Fired up, it will hum till dawn with moths, crazy for orange. Nights, August smells of rot, fried things, the dog food factory up wind. Heat reeks at the window, laps the sill in waves, settles in, pinning the sheets. Noisy heat. Heat like headache, like one more cop car accelerating up the street, all horn and throttle, as if sirens weren't enough. Someone slams a door against the approach of midnight, maybe lifts a quick breeze. Even the sound of sleep beside me won't let me sleep. Then, too, this is a landscape of trains. Midnight arrives, heavy with freight.

Think of the engineer, dragging his ass through the mock-blackness of night, the sleepless half dark. Think of the roar inside that head, and the ratchetting hack, the endless track, of the yackety-friggin-yack, all that back-talk, chattering steel. What does he conduct but a well-oiled, orchestrated caravan of noise? What is he headed for but east, the shortest route to sunrise, maybe sleep? A surprising moon catches him off-guard.
CONTENTS

HART CRANE MEMORIAL POETRY AWARD

Carol E. Miller ....... Noise .......................... 1

POETRY

Gigi Danko .......... 501 .......................... 3
endi .......................... 4
Phyllis Lomax Martin : Little One So Dear to Me ....... 5
Survivor ...................... 7
Kristen Evans ......... Midnight Magic ............... 9
Walter Bargen ... Spaghetti Western ............ 10
James Hrusovsky ... Today, .......................... 19
Wider Dreams of Silence ....... 20
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Winter Poem Warning ....... 24
Janis Rice ........ Passion .......................... 27
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Ron Book ........ I Remember the Little Things ........... 40
Every Morning I Feel Good .......... 41
G. Timothy Gordon ... Naming the Night ............ 50

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Joseph M. Dudley .... Real Life With Aliens ............ 11
Gary Baker .......... Pederasty: Intimacy Between .......... 25
A Man and a Boy ........ 26
James Carlson ....... Legacies .......................... 34
Ron Book ........ Carl, His Microphone .......... 43
and Marbel ........ 43

HART CRANE MEMORIAL POETRY AWARD WINNER

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but a well-oiled, orchestrated caravan
of noise? What is he headed for but east,
the shortest route to sunrise, maybe sleep?
A surprising moon catches him off-guard.
Obstacles rear and freeze in his path:
a felled phone pole, a lame dog, a tractor-trailer jack-knifed at a crossing gate,
a man, once, kneeling, palms raised in something like supplication, something like regret.

How can he stop for each of these?
He is all motion, all means to an end of whistles, switches, warning horns. An end.
The slick, sickening scrape of frozen brakes, shooting sparks, frictions--an end, an amen.
Like me, he wants to sleep, maybe to sit and smoke in peace, to hear only stars.

GIGI DANKO

501

I embedded you in the heart of an iceberg
large enough to entomb the prehistoric era,
hoping against hope
that like it, you too, would in time become extinct.

I forgot, though, about the fossils . . .
the more intact the fossil,
the more history about it is revealed;
the insight to that era becomes not only relevant,
it becomes immortal.

physical extinction becomes immortal through legend
But
not all that is dead stays buried
not all that is buried remains dead.

after all, the fossil is an empty and fragile shell of what once Was
powerful, strong, invincible, unbelievable, and an incredibly vital heartbeat
to the life it once knew.

admired from afar, you can but look at them
and wonder what life could have been back then.
they are handled with care and caution;
once shattered they are never again the same--
as a mere fragment,
the unexplored depth and mysteries they hold
become quite worthless.
but not ever finding out what there is to be learned,
creates an even bigger vacuum than life itself.
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GIGI DANKO

Discovery

Illusive illusions illustrated industriously as shattered secrets are savagely soured in the thicket that hides the haunting honesty of that double-dealing, drifting dungeon.
No escaping the enslavement encapsulated and treacherously trespassing in that triangle. Virulently with vigor virtuosity turns viscous with the wiles of the will with standing the wrath of the personal pensive penitence persistently present.
Conscious converging on confusion, the bawdy battle becomes a brittle barricade as requisite reason revives.
Myopic mind musings modify and muzzle the mystification.
After all the aspersions are assiduously assessed, the alien invasion inevitably enhanced by inebriation admits impulsiveness.
The suddenly searing signs are concisely and convincingly clear--To think these types of thoughts is a commonly constructed occurrence;
discovery of diverse diversion experienced by exemplary examples of the species, specifically the homo sapien samples.
Humility turns humble to the humorous hues of recognizing the return to being human again, after acquiring a husband.

PHYLLIS LOMAX MARTIN

Little One So Dear to Me

Little one so dear to me
In God's grace you went to be.
An angel in the promised land
To be so near the Savior's hand.
I see a smile upon your face
As you abide within His grace.
I see your shy and gentle grin
As your wings are being pinned.
I see you bouncing near His knee
And know it is a sight to see.
I see your arms about His neck
And on His cheek you place a peck.
Your halo tilted to one side
As you glow inside with pride.
The tears I shed in sorrow now
Are filled with joy and in vow
Of all the things I wished for you
The Lord provides us in His truth.
Although I cannot hold you close
You're in my heart and loved the most.
A precious love a parent gives
In only you it can be lived.
So as I hear a gentle breeze
I'll think it is your tiny sneeze.
And as I see the birds in flight
I'll hear you squeal a teens delight.
I know that you are not alone
Because you live upon His throne.
Upon the day when I shall die
I'll look upon your sparkling eyes.
I'll hug you close and hold you tight
For we'll be in God's Holy light.
Await me at the pearly gate
I promise that we won't be late.
So know my sweet that I love you.
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PHYLIS LOMAX MARTIN

Survivor

The womb from whence I came
was dark and void
but
ever so loving in its somnolence
it cradled and nurtured my presence
nudged and embraced me with its warmth
I defied my presence there
to enter this world of distrust.

This world of distrust from whence I came
was suspicious and doubtful
and
was lined with destruction in its uncertainty
it cradled and nurtured my presence
nudged and embraced me with its vagueness
I defied my presence there
to enter this world of deception.

This world of deception from whence I came
was ruse and sleight
but
was supported in core by faith inbred
it cradled and nurtured my presence
nudged and embraced me with its subterfuge
I defied my presence there
to enter this world of deprivation.

This world of deprivation from whence I came
was sorrowful and bereaved
and
was excused by the nature of what being poor means
it cradled and nurtured my presence
nudged and embraced me with its lessons
I escaped my presence there
to enter this world of reality.
Little one so dear to me
In God's grace you went to be.

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it cradled and nurtured my presence
nudged and embraced me with its lessons
I escaped my presence there
to enter this world of reality.
This world of reality from whence I am
is unique and cumbersome
but
is life as life was dealt me
it cradles and nurtures my presence
nudges and embraces me with all of life's experience
I maintain my presence here
to proclaim all of the good
that accompanied the four worlds
from whence I came.

I am a survivor.

KRISTEN EVANS

Midnight Magic

Walking along the shore
on a moonlit night,
under a thousand stars.
I hear whispers on the breeze
hinting at what is yet to come:
erotic mumblings.

Wide open spaces
as far as my eyes can see,
windswelt dunes invite us:
only pleasure awaits
the unselfish sharing
of the flesh and soul.

Dawn breaks over the horizon
and wakes us to each other,
glowing after the midnight magic
of two that became one
for an unforgettable moment
in precious time.
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WALTER BARGEN

Spaghetti Western

The wind is always blowing in a dirty wind, and the sun-bleached, starved-dog streets echo with the thud of clay bells hanging from eaves and the clatter of chipped stone chimes. Leather voices erupt inside kitchens, strapping their tongues sharp on syllables that stick in the baked earth walls. Houses spit the feathers of plucked words around the stained marble Virgin of Guadalupe. The barber in his talcum-and tortilla-scented shop on the corner folds towels and prepares his customers, cutting off their faces, trimming the fur growing in their blood. Masked, they soon join the parade to the town square where witches fly out of trumpets on brass brooms. Old men dance on bullets and young ones aim revolvers into ceilings. Old women sweep up the air’s confessions and young ones swallow ashes and grieve for the windswept smoke. What slips past the wrought iron gates besides the accordion’s blind music, the castinet of escaping stars, the moon’s broken guitar strings, a wind forever fingering great events, is a foolish, unstoppable love, and the dog left to drink out of the open mouth of someone who backed all the way down.

JOSEPH M. DUDLEY

Real Life With Aliens

I: Tea and Madness

“In a nutshell,” Jorge said as he stirred sugar into his tea, “no one knows what the hell is going on here. Everything’s just fallen apart.”

Lui opened his mouth to reply, but before he could say anything his eggs Benedict flew from his plate and hit him squarely in the face.

Outside, a small dog with shaggy, cinnamon-colored hair floated by the window, yapping and struggling for purchase in thin air.

Jorges continued as Lui wiped Hollandaise sauce from the bridge of his nose: “Anything can happen at any time, and there’s nothing we can do about it. It’s not a new type of war; that much we’re sure of, or at least think we’re sure of. Russia, China, Iraq, America, England—anyone with a reason to fight us—the same thing’s happening to them, too. We knew it was until all the communication satellites spun out into space, anyway. By now each of those countries could’ve sunk into the sea for all we know.”

Outside, the sky turned a dark red and began to rain tomatoes. A boy of eleven or twelve hurried past, his legs waving in the air like the eye stalks of some strange sea monster as he walked along on his hands, calling in a piping tenor voice for his dog to come home.

Lui again tried to reply, but at that moment Jorge’s tea cup rose from the table and shattered itself against Lui’s forehead, whereupon Lui held his head in his hands, leaned his elbows on the table, and began to moan.

“It’s a mad tea party,” Jorge commented wistfully, glancing at his wristwatch to confirm that the hands were still spinning in opposite directions. “If James Jeans was right and the universe is really more like a great thought than a great machine, the God’s become a schizophrenic. If not, then I’d say the machine is badly in need of repair.”
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II: Hard Times in the Tourist Trade

Before things went screwy, Maurice had been a successful Paris tour guide (the term successful, of course, being relative to the occupation). Now, however, he was an unsuccessful tour guide; no one came to Paris, not since the Eiffel Tower had lifted out of its concrete foundation, rose 1,000 feet in the air, turned lengthwise and began rotating like the second hand from a giant’s wrist watch. Worse yet, at sundown flesh grew over the metal skeleton and it became a giant disembodied penis, periodically ejaculating gallons of semen around the city. Nightly some thrill seekers still ventured into the deserted streets to snap photos of the gigantic, spinning phallus, but even this activity was waning in popularity as photographers were routinely struck to the ground and knocked unconscious when a seminal discharge landed on them.

It was understandable, Maurice thought as he sipped from a stained mug 3/4 full of stone-cold Earl Gray and bearing the legend QUIL, MOLENNUYER², that this national horror had put a sudden, jarring end to the tourist trade of the entire city. Of course, there was just no way to climb it anymore, and even if one were fool enough to try, no telling what would happen if you were still inside when it transformed at sundown.

Other things: even though gravity remained relatively constant, if one left one’s window open in the evening one was taking the chance on having a loaf of bread or a lady’s silk scarf or almost any object one could name come floating through. But of course, one (being Maurice) could always use the loaf of bread.

The word on the street these days was that at the Louvre, the Mona Lisa’s eyes now moved constantly back and forth, metronome-like, and that she sometimes disrobed and flashed the few spectators still courageous or foolish enough to bother with art, smiling lasciviously all the while. At first Maurice was sure her animation would mean the tourist business was saved, but then stories began to appear about how Winged Victory, still headless and armless, had begun chasing the few remaining patrons about the place and batting them on the head with her marble wings, while Venus de Milo intercepted those who escaped Victory, challenging them to matches of stump-boxing as they reached the bottom of the stairs.

It’s not fair, Maurice thought, sipping again at his cold tea and visualizing the statues skipping gaily about the galleries while Mona did a strip-tease inside her frame. Of course, there were still a few unfortunate culture vultures who wore their bruises and bandages like badges of honor, proof that they’d survived fine art. But by and large, the Louvre had had it, too.

Our whole city is revolting against us, Maurice thought. It’s just not fair.

He sipped his tea again.

III: Under Cover of Madness

Amid all the confusion and despair, the invisible spaceship landed. The aliens donned their dark glasses and exited it silently, fanning outward and blending with the population, creating a virtual dragnet over the city.

IV: After the Lusting

Laurette lay cuddled against Pierre, the covers around their knees, listening to the sound of tomatoes pelting the roof of her apartment building and thinking about Pierre’s dark glasses. Strange about those glasses; he wouldn’t even take them off in bed. Strange, but real sexy.

She closed her eyes and let out a long, contented sigh against his bare chest.

“You’re the best, baby,” she breathed.

In her present warm, exhausted glow, the rhythm of his breathing was hypnotic, meshing dissonantly with the sound of her own breath and the steady plop-plop of the tomatoes on the roof to inch her ever closer to the dark lake of sleep.
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It was understandable, Maurice thought as he sipped from a stained mug 3/4 full of stone-cold Earl Gray and bearing the legend QUI, MOLENNUYER? that this national horror had put a sudden, jarring end to the tourist trade of the entire city. Of course, there was just no way to climb it anymore, and even if one were fool enough to try, no telling what would happen if you were still inside when it transformed at sundown.

Other things: even though gravity remained relatively constant, if one left one’s window open in the evening one was taking the chance on having a loaf of bread or a lady’s silk scarf or almost any object one could name come floating through. But of course, one (being Maurice) could always use the loaf of bread.

The word on the street these days was that at the Louvre, the Mona Lisa’s eyes now moved constantly back and forth, metronome-like, and that she sometimes disrobed and flashed the few spectators still courageous or foolish enough to bother with art, smiling lasciviously all the while. At first Maurice was sure her animation would mean the tourist business was saved, but then stories began to appear about how Winged Victory, still headless and armless, had begun chasing the few remaining patrons about the place and batting them on the head with her marble wings, while Venus de Milo intercepted those who escaped Victory, challenging them to matches of stump-boxing as they reached the bottom of the stairs.

It’s not fair, Maurice thought, sipping again at his cold tea and visualizing the statues skipping gaily about the galleries while Mona did a strip-tease inside her frame. Of course, there were still a few unfortunate culture vultures who wore their bruises and bandages like badges of honor, proof that they’d survived fine art. But by and large, the Louvre had had it, too.

Our whole city is revolting against us, Maurice thought. It’s just not fair.

He sipped his tea again.

III: Under Cover of Madness

Amid all the confusion and despair, the invisible spaceship landed. The aliens donned their dark glasses and exited it silently, fanning outward and blending with the population, creating a virtual dragnet over the city.

IV: After the Lusting

Laurette lay cuddled against Pierre, the covers around their knees, listening to the sound of tomatoes pelting the roof of her apartment building and thinking about Pierre’s dark glasses. Strange about those glasses; he wouldn’t even take them off in bed. Strange, but real sexy.

She closed her eyes and let out a long, contented sigh against his bare chest.

“You’re the best, baby,” she breathed.

In her present warm, exhausted glow, the rhythm of his breathing was hypnotic, meshing dissonantly with the sound of her own breath and the steady plop-plop of the tomatoes on the roof to inch her ever closer to the dark lake of sleep.
Almost there, she pulled away and bounced off the bed, padding naked toward the lighted doorway of the kitchenette.

"I'm gonna make some tea, luv," she called over her shoulder into the shadows. "Want some?"

"No," came Pierre’s distant, stoic reply.

"Suit yourself." Humming, pleased with herself for finding such a good buy at the bakery, an unexpected gem with legs, arms, dark glasses and other goodies, Laurette put the kettle on, rinsed the pot with warm water, and put Dutch biscuits on a plate, coconut on one side and dark, bitter chocolate on the other.

From the other room came the sound of bedsprings, and then the sound of the latch on the boarded-up balcony door. When Laurette heard tomatoes splatting against her bedroom floor, she felt the first vague stabs of annoyance, and moved to the bedroom doorway to see what the frig was going on.

"Good god," she said as the kettle started to whistle. There was Pierre standing bare-assed out on the balcony, giving the neighbors a free show with his arms raised like he was Moses parting the red sea, tomatoes mashing into him and running like mangled guts down his body.

V: Seen From Shelter

Francois had chased after his little dog until the palms of his hands were sore, and finally he’d collapsed in a doorway to weep bitterly as Benni rose up over the rooftops and disappeared into the tomato storm.

Why couldn’t he walk right, on his feet? There was no answer, only the almost certain knowledge as he watched tomatoes smash against the pavement that by now Benni had probably been pelted to death.

Then he saw the man wearing nothing but shades standing on the little balcony. For a moment Francois thought he meant to piss down onto the street, and even through his tears he managed to smile and laugh a little.

But the man was holding his arms up in the air and looking up at the red sky, and then just for a moment he saw the unimaginably huge silver orb of the spaceship hovering just above the building, saw it shoot out a stream of ghostly purple light which engulfed the man, and then they were both gone.

His heart was thundering in his head and he realized he wasn’t breathing. For a moment it had been just like in the cinema, only there were no funny-looking little men, just the ship, and it had only been there for an instant.

Still, it had been there, and he had seen it with his own eyes. Nearly bursting with the knowledge of it, Francois jumped to his hands and hurried back out into the street, tomatoes punching into him and soaking in to the skin.

VI: Baby (w/ blue eyes)

The tomato storm had stopped, but in the open balcony doorway literally knee-deep puree had accumulated, and a tomato-colored stain was slowly spreading across the floor from beneath it.

Laurette, however, hadn’t noticed. Inside of nine hours, her body had gone through massive changes as the child Pierre had seeded in her reached full term.

Now she sprawled, still nude, on the cranberry velvet sofa in front of her ornamental brick fireplace. Every now and again a barely audible little gasp escaped her parched lips as waves of sensation which normally developed over months washed over her with tidal force. But she knew what was happening: the baby had told her.

The birth took place quickly and with only a little pain. The little girl inside her womb had told her what she was going to do to stop it, but Laurette did not understand the technical details. When the time came, all she knew was that there was no reason for her to be afraid, so she lay on the sofa pushing spasmodically until the birth was complete. Then, in a dazed sort of fog, she watched her own hands work with surgical precision as they tied off the cord and
Almost there, she pulled away and bounced off the bed, padding naked toward the lighted doorway of the kitchenette.

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cut it, then bathed her new daughter and wrapped her in a fresh white beach towel.

The child had the most incredible light blue feline eyes, this new little one. No whites at all; just large turquoise irises with slitted, black pupils.

After the baby’s bath was completed, Laurette washed herself and put on a cool silk robe. Then she lay back down with her child and went to sleep.

VII: Video Junkie & the Upside-Down Kid

“Come, Papa!” Francois stopped to tug on his father’s pant leg, leaving bloody splotches from where the blisters on his hands were breaking, and almost falling into the knee-deep puree as he balanced on one hand.

“Yes, yes, boy. I’m right behind you.”
“You’re not, Papa,” Francois whined. “You’re watching the movie.”
“I’m coming right along; now let’s be done with this silliness and go home for some dinner.”
“It’s not silliness, Papa!” Francois argued, but it was no use. His father was engrossed by the little hand-held walkman television he was carrying, watching Fiend Without a Face on the Afternoon Matinee, oblivious to the over-powering stench of fetid tomatoes. “There really was a spaceship. I saw it, Papa; I did.”
“Yes, yes. Ooo, look at those brains go! Oh, there, they got another one!”

When they got to the apartment building, they were just in time to see a lady carrying a baby come out the front door and start plodding down the street.

“Maybe she saw it too,” Francois said excitedly, hurrying out from the relative shelter of the awning.
“Mmm?” He heard his father mutter behind him, distracted for a moment from the movie. “Oh, yes; quite.”
“Hey lady—” he called after the retreating figure. Then he did lose his balance and fell with a squishy plop! into the mashed tomatoes, juice stinging his eyes and soaking his clothes as a mouthful of the vile stuff choked off his exclamations.

VIII: Trek of the Zombie Women

Jandrelle—her daughter had named herself that—told Laurette to climb Montmartre, and so she unquestioningly was sloshing through the drying tomatoes with her child, oblivious to other women silently trudging up the hundreds of steps and carrying their own infants. Half-way there Laurette saw the great metal ship appear in the sky above the mountain’s summit (Jandrelle telepathically informed her that it had been there all along, hovering invisible above the city) and, like a giant stepping on a bug, reduced the Basilica of Sacre Coeur to dust as it landed on top of it.

When they reached the ship they were met by a man with turquoise cat-eyes who ushered them inside and down a gleaming white hallway. They followed him silently to a large auditorium, leaving bloody-red foot prints in their wake like a throng of martyred madonnas.

After they had silently taken their seats and began to nurse their infants, another Blue-Eyes appeared on the dias at the front of the room, his face magnified on a large viewing screen above his head, and said:

“In an hour you will leave this ship, and your children will be taken back to Earth, where our experiment in social genetics will continue. When you see them again they will most likely be grown, but an interactive holographic record of their childhood experiences will be kept for you should you so desire it.”

Laurette accepted his words uncritically, buffered by the contentment she felt radiating from Jandrelle and the other nursing babies.

“But aren’t we on Earth?” someone behind her asked.
“No, this is not Earth,” Blue-Eyes answered. “This is Social Experimentation Colony Alpha, a self-sustaining near-
cut it, then bathed her new daughter and wrapped her in a fresh white beach towel.

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recreation of Paris in orbit around Earth’s moon and monitored by scientific installations on the moon’s surface. The purpose of this particular experiment is to determine the effect on Earth society of genetically-enhanced children conceived and brought to term in a controlled environment.

“What about all the strange things that’ve been happening?” the woman beside Laurette asked. “Are they going to stop when your ship leaves?”

“Yes,” Blue-Eyes answered, “since these were only a cover for the entrance of our craft into the Near-Paris atmosphere.”

“Will we ever be able to go to the real Earth?” asked a woman near the front of the room.

“You will all be processed for transfer to Earth in due time. But for the moment you must understand that your part in the social experiment is not finished yet; Stage B will test both the psychological and physical effects of rapid term pregnancy, as well as your future ability to reproduce at normal biological levels. Temporarily, however, for security reasons which of course you can appreciate, your memories of the actual birth of your children and your time aboard this ship must be removed from your consciousness.”

“Blue-Eyes then collected his notes and left the room, leaving the new Mothers to nurse their children in peace before it was time to leave the ship.

Laurette felt Jandrelle’s growing excitement as the time for lift-off grew closer, and in her own mind a thought rose up: Maybe when I get to Earth and get my memories back I can find Pierre again.

And from Jandrelle: There will be many more Pierres.

JAMES HRUSOVSKY

Today

Today,

the clenched hands of hope turn
to fists of rage
beating down the broken page.
Ice glistens as dreams of summer winds blow
through my open frozen fingers.
This is how my song goes.

I’m reaching across this frozen distance
for me or you or for the veil that
drapes my quiet mind.
I’m looking for fire.
I’m looking for steel.
I’m looking for the water that binds this frozen body.
I’m looking to skate free.

This is how my song goes.
I am a songless bird hovering my body,
going in for the silent kill.
I am the phoenix looking for my ashes.
I am all spirit and no body.
I am being blown across this frozen ground.

I am trying to pick up the pieces.
I am trying to heal myself, but
I have no memory of being anyone.
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JAMES HRUSOVSKY

Wider Dreams of Silence

I sit at the trap door and wait.  
Men with belted waists  
fly-fish with my eyes for bait.  
I’m finger-tight holding down death’s door.

I’ll linger on the shore  
while seagulls try the holes in the ice  
and the fishermen wait to  
carry home fishy plates  
and drown oyster crackers with soup spoons.

The teenage boys with new-found Zeppelin tunes  
cruise the shore line  
on other summer afternoons.

Let other voices sing of tridents and washes hung in the spring.  
I sing of death’s blight and its eternal sting.

Empty air and the car rusts under the salty grime.  
Mud kingdoms of shaggy green mossmen where dead trees  
climb toward heaven but no longer shine.

I should have been the line  
that you searched for. I should have been the word  
that dove from your lips like a hungry, white bird.

PEGGY SUE BYRNES

They Come Wanting

They come wanting to buy me  
Sliding their “greazy” fingers  
Into their wallets . . .

How much do they have?  
Do they have enough  
To buy one kiss?  
Do they have enough  
To buy one breast?  
How much would it take  
For both breasts  
And no kiss?

Oh, I forgot the breasts--  
They want something else.  
They want to cop  
More than a feel . . .

They have good credit;  
They are family.  
Family buys the niece.  
Family buys the grand-daughter.

Uncles get blue light specials  
On nieces.  
Grandfathers get  
The senior citizen discount  
On grand-daughters.

Layaway is  
For relatives only.  
. . . Yeah, they want  
To lay away alright. . .

So I put my head
JAMES HRUSOVSKY

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So I put my head
Into cold storage.  
There is no other way  
To keep it... 

One by one  
They make their purchases.  
I see all of me  
On the counter-- 
All of me except my head. ... 

--And when I go  
To the E-Z Storage  
They won't give it back  
Without ID... 

But  
I have only one picture  
On me--  
And my head isn't there! 

Now I am  
Tough out of luck  
They say.  

But I know it's my head  
I say. 

It has everything  
I need in it.  

It has blue eyes  
That can cry.  
It has a room  
That can remember.  
It has talk mode 

That will tell... 

Sorry they say.  
No ID they say.  
Go away they say.  

... Back home I tear the house apart  
Looking for the pictures that prove  
I had that head.  
I know that it is mine! 

I find pictures indeed;  
Hundreds of them.  
I swim through them;  
Even in the kitchen--  
But none of them show  
That I have a head... 
All of them  
Have been cut off  
At the neck... 

I know I have lips  
I know I have a voice... 

They could not afford my head--  
Now I'm wondering,  
Can I?
Into cold storage.
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...Winter Poem Warning...

...Possible accumulation of four to six pages...
Word gusts of thirty to forty rhymes per hour...
Blowing and drifting adjectives may make reading treacherous...

GARY BAKER

Pederasty: Intimacy Between a Man and a Boy

After a morning filled with mundane and mechanical
bathroom preparation, an afternoon crammed with little variation to
the required regulation of university life, and an evening once again
empty, spent wondering if Katie is happier wherever she now loves,
I am stilled once again staring through a mist, languorously into the
young boy’s eyes. Trying to forget that I will soon be lying in bed
reaching for the warm, soft back that left too many months ago, the
boy’s eyes are a welcome diversion. I gaze quietly into those hazel
eyes that shine bright even when hidden within this lonely night,
knowing firsthand they are also eyes that have dimmed through the
living. His are eyes that fill quickly with tears, flash violently with
rage, but eyes that will linger and eternity on an arbitrary dream.

The intimacy between the boy and me is something that we
keep hidden within the wooden walls of this secluded little A-framed
home. We have never discussed if it’s the ramifications of
discovery that we fear, or just the jealousy of sharing our secrets
with those who could never understand. It’s hard for us to imagine
that anyone would comprehend why we feel it so important to
remain together. Has the world changed enough to accept what we
feel for each other without passing judgement? I doubt it.

I’m not sure if the boy stays with me as a convenience, a
habit, because it’s economical, or if he feels the same passionate
longings that I feel. Does he stay through boredom or some
misplaced empathy for my aging hunger? Maybe he just looks back
at these tired eyes, the graying hair, and the tracks on my face that
show the scars, in the same interesting way that an archaeologist
looks at a new discovery. I’m tired enough most nights though not
to ponder such motivations, only happy enough he lingers here to
help me pass on into his nightly fantasies.

For a short time once, the boy left me to my own delusions. Where
he went I dared not ask. I just assumed he went to that mountain
retreat deep in the Rockies he has often spent days rambling about,
or bought that small patch of land and raised rabbits, another of his
dreams. Where he vanished to was not important, it was only why
he left that mattered. I learned later that he had to leave. He felt
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After a morning filled with mundane and mechanical bathroom preparation, an afternoon crammed with little variation to the required regulation of university life, and an evening once again empty, spent wondering if Katie is happier wherever she now loves, I am stilled once again staring through a mist, languorously into the young boy’s eyes. Trying to forget that I will soon be lying in bed reaching for the warm, soft back that left too many months ago, the boy’s eyes are a welcome diversion. I gaze quietly into those hazel eyes that shine bright even when hidden within this lonely night, knowing firsthand they are also eyes that have dimmed through the living. His are eyes that fill quickly with tears, flash violently with rage, but eyes that will linger and eternity on an arbitrary dream.

The intimacy between the boy and me is something that we keep hidden within the wooden walls of this secluded little A-framed home. We have never discussed if it’s the ramifications of discovery that we fear, or just the jealousy of sharing our secrets with those who could never understand. It’s hard for us to imagine that anyone would comprehend why we feel it so important to remain together. Has the world changed enough to accept what we feel for each other without passing judgement? I doubt it.

I’m not sure if the boy stays with me as a convenience, a habit, because it’s economical, or if he feels the same passionate longings that I feel. Does he stay through boredom or some misplaced empathy for my aging hunger? Maybe he just looks back at these tired eyes, the graying hair, and the tracks on my face that show the scars, in the same interesting way that an archaeologist looks at a new discovery. I’m tired enough most nights though not to ponder such motivations, only happy enough he lingers here to help me pass on into his nightly fantasies.

For a short time once, the boy left me to my own delusions. Where he went I dared not ask. I just assumed he went to that mountain retreat deep in the Rockies he has often spent days rambling about, or bought that small patch of land and raised rabbits, another of his dreams. Where he vanished to was not important, it was only why he left that mattered. I learned later that he had to leave. He felt
alone, abandoned. I had allowed myself to heed to the inviting echoes of what others held as important, thinking that I didn’t need the boy and his illogical dreams.

That will never happen again. I have come to learn that his dreams are what make me what I am: the dreamer, the schemer, and the fool. The boy is who I was, and who I will be. He has been the reason for almost everything good that has ever happened. His dreams, his passions, his thoughts on how things should be, not why they are, give me reason.

So as the steam from the shower slowly escapes into the night, and I’m left with nothing except a gradually clearing bathroom, and fantasies no clearer than the mirror I have been staring languorously into, I guard with desperation the little boy in me that has survived this man’s life.

JANIS RICE

Passion

To a fortnight steal away for passionate embers here they stay. Secrets here are put to rest as a rose caresses every breast, tribute to a woman’s soft and heavenly hue. But what of love and what of you? For what is passion to a man, who holds the world within his hands, telling of honorable conquests in far away lands, and wears them like golden band, realizing passion starts with two. But what of love and what of you? Men and women contemplate the world together, love and hate forever wanting life anew. But what of love and what of you?
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JANIS RICE

The Blue and the Grey

In the cold stark stillness of early dawn
Soldiers all—we travel on,
weary emotions churning still heartfelt love
for country yearning to fill our souls with a
purpose to go on killing our enemy, the enemy
who was a brother only yesterday—did the reasons
for this madness go astray?
Our brothers dying in agony—both the blue and
the grey.
But the battle plans go on and on and on.

We long for good times gone by—memories of
home, and so we try to close our eyes and
remember. The sweet smells of home; magnolia,
bread baking and hay making seem so far removed
from gun powder and cannon fuse and oh the sounds
so sweet to us will hear.

The whippoorwill; trout streams cold and clear;
and still, or water rushing over rocky crevices
but no more, a reality brings us back to musket
and cannon roar.

And the sights of home etched in our memories
now our children running as free spirits in the
wind. These spirits are with us in battle, keeping
precious memories.
Forever, knowing all spirits—fathers, brothers,
mothers, and daughters, will be joined all together
at heaven’s door, and the suffering will be no
more.

ERIN LARSEN

Realization

As the candle burns, I ponder
   In my life am I doing right?
   Am I leading what is destined to be lead?
I think of my love.

Do I love for the right reason,
   Or do I love not to be alone?
I stand before my love’s image.
   Powerful before me is an erect posture,
   Large and intimidating. Gentle and agile.
   Soft and steadfast.

I feel as if I should cower before such awesomeness,
   But I too, stand hard.

Looking into my love’s eyes,
   I see I am my love’s equal.
Do I love only for this power?

Do I see only what I want to,
   To raise my level of being?
I think how I am a coward.
   I fear the future, the changes.
   I fear the acceptance and rejection of my true self.

In a valley of blankness, I now stand.
   It is not white or black.
   It is not colored nor clear.
   It is there, a presence unexplained but felt in my mind and
   soul,
   By my heart and spirit.
JANIS RICE

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It is there, a presence unexplained but felt in my mind and
soul,
By my heart and spirit.
Do I question love or my own existence now?
It is neither.
I take in all that my senses can handle,
   But soon these blank sensations fade.

The candle dims.
My eyes . . . closed
My breath . . . shallow
My pulse . . . slowed to an almost nonexistent rhythm.

Listening again with intensity,
   I find I am no longer in nothing.

I feel my love’s firm hands on my shoulders.
   Their cool touch moves down my unshielded back.

I feel the fog envelop my mind as the hands slowly retract
   Back to their owner.

In a rage of lust, my body quakes.

Finding my eyes closed again,
   I open them.
   Two roses are caressed by my sight.

They float within my grasp.
   The one red rose dances, gayly;
   The yellow . . . stands silent.

Soon the red will flutter away,
   Leaving the morbid feeling of the other.

Does this mean I am dead?
No.

Does this mean I will die?
Possibly, but not soon.

The yellow rose is touched by the same two hands that
   Were relieving me of my loneliness.

The hands raise the radiant color of the yellow rose to a face . . .
   My love’s face.

Here a smile appears and all my questions seem to have answers.

Love goes on through the fear and loneliness.
   Morbid times to happy, safe, and peaceful ones.

With this I know my answer.
I do love you.
And the candle goes out.
Do I question love or my own existence now?

It is neither.

I take in all that my senses can handle,
   But soon these blank sensations fade.

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JESSICA SKLAR

Traveling the Blue Route

“There’s a store nearby that sells lamps and tombstones.”
The first words spoken in fifty miles. I think of the store.
Inside: bright brass-reflected faces, curving into one another,
kissing. Outside: the arching rocks, damp in Pennsylvania spring
showers. We’ve been driving together too long.
I’m holding the road map like a curse, our path snaked
in red. Your knuckles are white on the wheel.
We are thinking of the time you almost hit me,
back an hour ago. In the 105° heat, we drive
with the windows open. I’d prefer air-conditioning, but hell,
it’s your car. I pump an imaginary brake pedal,
think of last night

on the Jersey beach. Waves black as tar, sand
an unnatural sheen under boardwalk lights. God,
you were beautiful. And we even held hands.
But the Jersey beach is dangerous at night,

so we left, and went back to the hotel room,
and watched “Late Night with David Letterman.”
A certain lack swelled in me like a cancer.
I remembered the time in Israel, when a man I didn’t know

suddenly and wordlessly asked me to kiss him, signing it
with his hands. I regretted saying no
as soon as it was said, but he spoke no English, and didn’t
understand
when I tried to take it back.

We are thinking of the time you almost hit me.
We’re red and peeling from a two-hour nap
in the sun, but now the sky is an old overcoat,
and it is hard for us to breathe. It’s like

we are children again, and are trying desperately to understand
a conversation we can barely hear.
Certain words flash in each others’ glances:
It might have happened. Bitch.

Later, on the steps of your house, we don’t know how
to say goodbye. We try to touch gently, but with our burns
even this is unintentionally brutal. The sky opens
and begins pelting us with rain. As I walk away,

I hear you close the door heavily behind me.
We are thinking of the time you almost
hit me. We are thinking of the indulgent punishments
we all conceive for ourselves.
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Legacies

As he smiles, the wrinkles around his lips become more apparent with each passing day. I see the remnants of youth that aging couldn’t steal. His narrow face is fully contradictory against his ideals, his open mindedness allows any comments to be accepted. How many times did I gaze up looking at his face, wondering if I would ever become what I loved the most? His black hair is in a constant battle against the shining gray that is assuming its rightful crown. This is how it’s supposed to be. I see a man, whose struggles have left him a physical shadow of what he used to be. I only knew him after life had taken a toll on him, and it’s only after life had stolen his youthful accomplishments and broke his childhood dreams where I see him now.

So many times have I seen those stern lips which hide the pain. The lips that have kissed his mother, the lips that have corrected me when doing wrong, the lips that have voiced the truth. His dark eyebrows protect the delicate blue eyes that speak the need for peace. His eyes project the image of love back towards me with an undying compassion that time can never take. Each hardship is marked within the skin that surrounds his pools of blue. His eyes, biased mirrors, are the images that even my childhood perceptions remain unchanged. Who knows what images his eyes beheld? Watching cowboy movies as a child, opening birthday presents for his tenth birthday, seeing what the ravages of war can do, and the birth of his two children are but some of the mere episodes experienced by such a loving eye.

The kitchen table allowed me to study his strong hands. These hands which corrected and embraced me, the hands which labored to put a meal on the table, the hands which placed a wedding ring on his lover’s hand. It’s interesting how age can build character and create definition upon someone, especially on his hands. Tense muscle has shifted allowing weary veins to rise in a more visible fashion. Hands capable of expressing hatred only declared its devotion. These busy hands helped tend to fields as well as hunt for a Thanksgiving turkey that his parents could not afford.

How many times have I gazed upon his face looking for some sign of resentment, but only found adornment, to expect a closed hand, but only found an open one, and to search for closed arms but discovered and open embrace? I see a person who has lived a good life and done the honorable things to survive. With the hand life dealt him, an honest heart took the best approach possible. Life has a tendency to unearth the hidden side of a person, whether good or bad, but it’s hard to believe there is a bad side to his being. By looking at the appearance of the man who gave me everything I am, including the person I want to become, it is more than an admiration felt for one who respects a prominent person in one’s life, but it is a feeling felt between a father and his son.
JAMES CARLSON

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BARRABRA CAMPBELL

The Painted Vase

This is not a modern story.
This is a Russian elegy with a red vase, an alphabet
I trace
the letters, their declension and later
from some distance they shout back
pallid and tumult and rest
finally on a small desk under an unfinished painting
and small red vase.

Here is the story:
There are rows of painted trees, rows swaining
the low slope of hill. The moon hangs for 2 days
at 10 a.m. visible, thrilling the flat
blue field of sky a whole quarter
tube of blue, cadet, cerulean;
sky blued up
around the flat gray apple flesh

Of a boy, but he’s not there. No
one is painted in yet, compelled by simple red apples
or a red squirrel bred
for the clamor and limit of trees
and the next minute

and the next minute is the painter’s trace, a line
to guide the boy, lover or herdsman, to the vase painted
in the right quarter
of the canvas, level with
the limit of trees.

This will be his first world:
The red vase and fluid body
of the squirrel, bloated, fluid then bloated again.
He will stare at color soaked
in light, trace his finger up the tree

bark and shout the name he sees there the shame of my

love O love I will never leave here

as light

falls on the broken neck, on every articulated
bone. A red vase of buffed glass--
handled passed & set the body pressed
flat, a dun hand,
palm and flesh quick-stroked
The tricks of light on tree bark the apples The vase
sits, a smear of color
a closed bowl of pooled blood
base & neck

crooked, unsexed, a brown slur of water mixing
with sinew, reared for this my love the limit and clamor of trees
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"Untitled"

Desperate feeling drives me up and off my pillow, awake.
Another mosquito net night, crushes my chest and drains tears like oil from my eyes.
And I can't breathe for choking and spitting and wiping my nose.
How did I get here?
What empty ship left me in this rain forest of rude affliction?
What cruel captain of long black curls and quicksand eyes you are.
You sail through my mind.
Not even sleep shuts out your roughened hands, or scent, like clean water in a pail of stones.

"Untitled"

So it has come to this: the nights, like grave-clothes wrapped around me; images, like clods of dirt that pile up on one another smothering me.
The beating of my heart, as faint as a dried spray.
It has come to this; and I am bones.
God I am dry, as though you left me on some valley floor divested of all that would mark me as one of the alive.
You vampire.
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I Remember the Little Things

There was a time, before my innocence was put in a suitcase and mailed cross country, when every Wednesday during Fall and Winter, my mom would bake beans and ham. While outside the winds beat against our Saran taped windows and the snow piled against our door, inside, the warm, sweet wetness of simmering beans and ham would fill our drab, cracked apartment. I remember the gray pink hock sitting in the plump succulent flavor filled beans and how, I, behind my mom's back, tore at the soft, wet flesh, popping it into my mouth. I never thought she saw.

My mom and I would sit around the table nervously waiting for the old man to finish his shift. At six, the door would sweep open and he would step in from the cold smelling of steel and sweat. Grabbing the back of his chair he would plant his ass and scoop at those beans, filling his plate. We could then eat.

Done, he would leave us and step into the living room. I remember him, broad shoulders swabbed in the weird, brilliantly blue gray light from the t.v. Gunsmoke was his favorite and we watched.

Later, in bed and wrapped in the darkness, I would almost fall asleep to the muffled sound of the t.v. I heard, through the daze of my almost asleep sleep, the creak of my door opening, and I saw through lightly closed eyes, him standing in the soft haze of the hall light, watching me. I remember the sound of his breath, and the door closing as he stepped away. And then I fell asleep.

Every Morning I Feel Good

I run.
My feet pound the ground.
My breath comes in short gasps.
Through my nose, hot air wheezes.
The sun scalds the back of my neck.
My bald spot is hot.

Around me cars, trucks, and buses meet and merge, their noises crashing into each other, creating cacophony and disorder.
Fuzzy blurs of percussion and diagonals crossing and colliding as I stumble past.

My legs move,
skinny sticks of boiled chicken meat stretched over bone.

Unison?
repetition
Static movements of right before left, left over right,
heal to ball . . . to toe . . . toe to ball . . .
to heel.

Over and over, again and again.

I am tired.

My sides hurt and I breathe hard.
The air comes to me in hot balls through swollen lungs.
Sweat runs into my eyes and they tear and burn.

I taste my stomach.

I stop, sides heaving, gasping for breath.
Bent over, hands on my knees, I drool

I'm going to vomit.
The bile swims to the back of my throat.
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repetition
Static movements of right before left, left over right,
heel to ball . . . to toe . . . toe to ball . . .
to heel.

Over and over, again and again.

I am tired.

My sides hurt and I breathe hard.
The air comes to me in hot balls through swollen lungs.
Sweat runs into my eyes and they tear and burn.

I taste my stomach.

I stop, sides heaving, gasping for breath.
Bent over, hands on my knees, I drool

I'm going to vomit.
The bile swims to the back of my throat.
I taste it.

I close my eyes

Seconds become minutes before the pain goes away.
I straighten, and my lungs are filled with cool air.
My eyes are dry and the bitter taste at the back of my throat is gone.

I breathe deeply, step from the pool of sweat, and turn to go home, impatient to tell someone . . .

Anyone?
Everyone!
About my great run.

I FEEL GOOD!

RON BOOK

Carl, His Microphone and Marbel

Behind him, a black cow grazed deeply through a brown field of waverng, tall grass. Above and behind, thin wispy clouds blown by a cold March wind slipped across. In front of him, a constant drip of water falling rhythmically, one drop into another from the open tap to the rusty cup below was heard. Carl stood and looked long through the wide picture window, past the field where the cow grazed and across the black snake of county road that bordered the property to the sound of rushing water that ran beyond a line of tall trees in the distance. Carl, eating his ham sandwich, picked up the phone and dialed. “Hello Aunt Bee, it’s me. No, not too far. I should be there around six tomorrow. Yes dear, I’ll call. Bye.” Carl put the receiver down and finished his sandwich. He belched, spit out a slimy sliver of meat and touched his crotch. He was happy.

Carl sat at a small, pressed board table, and, holding a mini tape recorder loosely, he started talking in a tinny whisper. “I’m back. Seems like it was only last week when I was here last. But it wasn’t. It was much longer . . . much deeper . . . much farther along . . . the berm where I’m standing now.” Carl suddenly stopped talking. He raised and tilted his head. The only sounds were the constant dripping, and somewhere outside his door the faint wailing of Johnny River’s ‘Secret Agent Man.’ Carl relaxed and started talking. “I like churches, I like to sit inside them and listen to them breathe. They do breathe you know. I can hear and taste their breath. It is faint and tainted with the sweet taste of incense. When I leave them, when I step from their door and into the still air, I smell of perfume, and this smell makes me attractive to other people. Just ask Marbel.

“I met Marbel in a church, Saint Francis. It’s that great, blonde stone church over the bridge in East Liverpool at the corner of First and Waverly, across the street from the Thom McCann’s. I remember that day as if it was my last day on earth. In some twisted, curvy way it was. My last day as a human being. How just, that it started where it was to end, in a church, a god damned church!”
I taste it.

I close my eyes

Seconds become minutes before the pain goes away.
I straighten, and my lungs are filled with cool air.
My eyes are dry and the bitter taste at the back of my throat is gone.

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"Aunt Bee and I were at a funeral, a funeral for some poor sap named Ernie. Ernie was the son of Aunt Bee’s hairdresser Korina. Korina was a Jewish immigrant from Poland. She had red hair, and she was fat, with great full hips that moved as if lubricated and placed on a pin point swivel, kind of like a gyroscope. Well, Ernie killed himself, just before Christmas. He got buck naked, tied a neon yellow colored nylon cord around his neck, the other end around the base of Fadder’s bridge and walked straight into the Ohio River, just west of East Liverpool. He went in on Christmas Eve, and wasn’t found until early that spring, around Easter. Well, let me tell you something, after a few months in that water, you don’t come out looking so nice. Feeder Crey found him. He saw the cord and followed the line into the water expecting to find a trap line, and instead comes face to face with the ghost of Christmas past! Fuck, Feeder wasn’t ever the same after that. Two months later, Feeder ate two bags of speed, went nuts, killed some biker chic, and ate her foot, but that’s another story. Let me get back to Marbel.

"I’m sitting next to Aunt Bee, hands in my lap, coat over my hands, wishing I hadn’t taken off my coat cause it’s so damn cold in the place. You know how churches never seem hot enough in the winter or cold enough in the summer. Well, we can see our breath! And people are coughing and hacking and I can hear them scuffing their shoes across the floor. All this noise plus the sun’s pouring through the stained glass, making all these weird fucking displays across the room. Shading everybody and everything in different colors and shit. And I’m bored. I mean, I didn’t know the guy. Jesus, the guy ached himself and ate fish for three months, all over some girl for Christ sakes! But that’s another story too. Well, in front of me, Korina is wailing and flinging her ass all over the place and the minister or priest or whatever is wailing, and people all around me are wailing and crying and dumping their asses everywhere. It’s complete pandemonium, absolute chaos. I calmly sit there with my hand on my lap, under my coat, just watching the clock move slowly by, while this mountain people, or river people, or whatever they are, sending this pathetic piece of fish food to his after life, when I catch a tick in the muscle on the back of my neck. No, I don’t mean the bug, but a fucking muscle contraction that keeps jerking my head around. I kind of looked like one of those fast forwarded turtle movies that are shown on t.v. all the time, you know where the turtle’s head keeps disappearing inside his shell, again and again until you want to scream and rip it off. Well, on the seventh or eighth jerk my eyes jam when they are grabbed by this thing sitting six pews behind. Oh, man! Marbel, all five foot three, one hundred pounds of well curved, finely spaced, and highly fuckable flesh and the devil.

"Her dirty blond hair was matted and was held fast against her pasty white forehead, and her mascara under her dark eyes was running, but in the deep valley in the middle of her top lip, a small glistening bubble of sweat caught the sun’s reflection. I saw the face of the Madonna and she had matted dirty blond hair. Marbel flicked something off her lip, and she caught me staring. She smiled slightly, it could have been a sneer, and looked straight into me, through my skin and into my bones, all the way to my liver. Her stare was chemotherapy, and I was being cured of whatever it was!

"Her smile faded, and she turned away, slipped on shades and slumped into her pew. I was frozen until I noticed this small, thin, dark haired old woman dressed in black, with a jutting nose that went far beyond her face, scowling and shushing me. I turned to the sermon.

"It was over and the people were winding their way past the closed coffin. Aunt Bee and I made our way past the sobbing Korina and out the side door. I remember the brilliant sun and how cold everything was. It wasn’t so strange if you were brought up around here, cause spring comes to this area real hard, and not too polite. The sky is usually topped in a layer of thick, angry, dark gray clouds layered and mixed. The wind is always so cold, biting, and shrill, and it drives the rain in great sheets that fall hard to the ground. But on that day there wasn’t any wind, it was bright and
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sunny and cold. Everything was cold, so cold that it came to you through the seams in your clothing and stayed next to your skin, hugging and laying upon your skin.” Carl pulled the covers to his chin, and blew hot air into his palm. “Oh, wow, I remember standing next to Aunt Bee, when she turned and said to me.

“Carl dear, you drive the Lincoln home, I’m going to the grave with Korina, Mr. Mora will take me home.’

“Are you sure?’

“Yes, dear. It was so nice of you to come with me, I know Korina appreciated it very much.’

“I faked my way through, ‘It’s not an inconvenience Aunty, I could go with you.’ I was too good.

“You would, you wouldn’t mind? That way I wouldn’t have to bother Mr. Mora,’ Aunt Bee smiled back.

“Oh, wonderful,’ I said through clenched teeth, ‘Oh, wonderful.’ Aunt Bee turned away, and my stomach dropped to the tops of my wingtips, and my smile withered like a grape into a raisin. ‘Oh, shit!’ thought to myself, ‘You fucking idiot!’

“Aunt Bee turned to me, ‘No, you go along. I’m going to Korina’s after the service and it wouldn’t be fair to keep you from your writing.’

“My heart about burst with happiness and I was about to grab Aunty and kiss her full on the mouth when my eye caught Marbel slicing her way through the crowd. I hugged Aunt Bee away and watched as Marbel stepped through the crowd and passed me. Our eyes caught and held, and as she went by, I caught a faint wisp of a familiar scent. Incense, thick and sweet and clinging to her like a shroud around an old, black clad widow. I thought I saw her roll her eyes in the direction that she was going. I let go of my aunt and daze-like, followed like a panting dog across the street.

‘Carl, where are you going?’ My aunt’s voice trailed behind me as I stepped across the plowed snow heap that lined the street and followed that great, undulating, and gently rolling from side to side dancer’s ass that Marbel had. Without glancing behind her, as if she knew that I was following her, she made her way down the sloping brick streets that ran towards the river, and turned west across Thompson Avenue, which coursed alongside the great river, which flowed swiftly behind. She picked up her pace, and I was losing her as she moved around and over and through streets and alleys and backyards, until she disappeared around a bend edged in dented trash cans, old tires, and cardboard boxes. I stopped, confused, then moved in the direction where she went. I turned the tight corner and saw her leaning against a pitted cement gray pylon that supported Fadder’s bridge. She casually drew on a cigarette, and as I slowly made my way to her, she blew smoke through her nose, and the silver smoke mixing with her own moist breath created great flumes of smoke, and for a minute, she resembled a dragon.

“Marbel stood with her legs slightly apart and her dress, now visible, drawn tightly across her hips. I looked, transfixed by the subtle outline of her thighs against the sheer dark material of her dress. ‘You followed me.’ I said nothing until I got past her ass and legs and could look her in the eye. ‘Yes.’

“Well, what do you want?’ she said through the smoke. ‘I don’t know.’ She stepped closer, ‘just what I like, a man who knows what it is that he wants.’ I began to think that I had made a mistake. ‘What’s your name?’ ‘Marbel Odems . . . and yours?’

‘Carl Sticks.’

“What are you doing at Ernie’s funeral?’

“My Aunt made me come with her . . . I didn’t really know the poor guy . . . and you?”

“Ernie . . . well, Ernie and I knew each other pretty well.’

“You work together or something?’

“More something than anything else, Ernie and I fucked each other.’

“I wasn’t prepared for that. Marbel stepped closer, so close that I could smell her skin through the layers of perfume and incense. ‘Where do you live?’

“I don’t live anywhere, I’m staying with my aunt Bee, you might know her as Beatrice Sticks.’
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‘‘What are you doing at Ernie’s funeral?’"

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‘‘Ernie . . . well, Ernie and I knew each other pretty well.’"

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‘‘I don’t live anywhere, I’m staying with my aunt Bee, you might know her as Beatrice Sticks.’"
"'You live in that great big, red, brick house, the one near the river's bend, the one with the rose trellis and the veranda that goes all around the house?'

'In time ago.' Marbel opened her coat and stepped even closer, I could feel the pressure and warmth of her thighs through my coat, and her breath smelled like whiskey and mint.

'I've always wanted to live in a house like that, a great big, wonderful house, tall, with an oak tree that touches the sky, like the one in your front yard.'

'Yeah, I . . . have one... I mean my aunt does.'

'Could I come by some time and look inside?'

'Sure, anytime. You said that you and Ernie were together?'

Marbel never moved away. 'No, I said we just fucked, Ernie said we were together.'

'Well, you must be pretty upset that he's dead.'

'Not really, Ernie was a woos. Anybody who does themselves over somebody else is a woos. Ernie played the clarinet and he was a woos.' She dead panned. 'You a woos, Carl?'

'Uh, no, I don't think of myself that way, huh uh, no.' Marbel pressed herself against me hard, and casually brought her hand between my legs.

'Good, Carl, cause if you become one, I'll kill you, just like Ernie.' Marbel wiped her hand along my zipper and smiled through clenched teeth.

A horn blew outside, and Carl shook his head. "I should have left, but the touch of her hand and the slight sourness of her breath kept in the fold. Had I left, had I pushed her hand away and turned around and just left, I wouldn't be here now, lying on this bed talking into this microphone with this gun between my legs." Carl moved the microphone from his lips and let his hand fall limply to his side. "I'm tired now, I think I should rest a little before I go on. I can continue tomorrow, when the sun comes back and I've eaten. Then I can tell my story to the end, of me and Marbel, my aunt Bee, and that great, red bricked house with the trellis and the wrap around veranda that sits just off the road, hidden behind that grand century old tree.
"You live in that great big, red, brick house, the one near the river's bend, the one with the rose trellis and the veranda that goes all around the house?"

"My aunt owns it, it was given to her by her father, a long time ago." Marbel opened her coat and stepped even closer, I could feel the pressure and warmth of her thighs through my coat, and her breath smelled like whiskey and mint.

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Naming the Night

"I'll play third, first, left field. I'll play anywhere—except Philadelphia."

That night Ritchie Allen took it downtown, far over the Coca-Cola sign towering the left field stands at Connie Mack, I was still plopped across the wroughiron armrest, red cranky seats, inhaling the last clump half of Dominick Marano’s grilled cheesesteak hoagie and flipping to Byrum Saam on FUL and the Boobirds as No. 15 took two quick curves, fooled more by motion than by art, stepped out of the box, scoured some dirt, flourished the resinbag all around the barrel, all along the stern and knob, clapping hands primly together like a pouty maestro at La Scala, hoisted the 42-ounce ebony Louisville again, riding it way across the plate the way a man sometimes measures himself by his labor, big black man, who, May 29, 1965, played 3rd, mostly, and badly, really badly, sometime later (aka Dick), played 1st, played anywhere not in the way, for a while stuffed a corked-out Afro up under the bill of his cap so that itched-out, once decked Frank Thomas in the cage for "remarks," whiffed too much with impunity, bore the Boobirds for years and developed a complex, sort of, then, in that wristy way he had, leaned into one like Aaron (though he was not at all like Aaron), the shot off somebody good like Robert Friend or Vernon Law (no, Larry Jackson, Chicago!) ripping high and hard into the iron arclights of the sweltering Philly night, and we, all of us, not caring a rat’s-ass about the score, gasping, now standing as if on psychic cue, eyes planed for flight, and watching it flare up and up and up in all its ballness like an ICBM recherche on a search-and-destroy, eyeing its hot nightflight, eyeing DA himself circling 1st in his mincing way, he too taking it all in, maybe thinking, "Shit, you do that!," and all-of-us-as-one gogogoeing it clear up greygirding rafters and over the iron pylon grating and 529 perfectly out of The Mack feet to some Lehigh Avenue stoop the way we always supposed... You, softspoken loner, from of all places Wampum, Pa., you drew trouble afield, cleats revising the flaked, bare earth about the bag and crafting pissy messages "during work" for management to read

NO WHY MOM CHI-NOW

never droll or wry or arty or even zen, just dead serious, no doubt dreaming of touts and trotter, your sulkies, running the handicap at Liberty Bell next day or antique script on fresh flannels, junior league, next time, or the way love can never redeem expectation, no matter how prodigal, but maybe not, you, reconnoitering 3rd, coming home, while I, while we, forgot for maybe the only moment in our other, raw lives, "Ritchie."

"Dick," "DA," each man, each manstep, pulling our whole past back into the Beautiful
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CONTRIBUTORS

Sharon Norman is a sophomore Criminal Justice major at KSUTC. Janis Rice has been involved with theater at KSUTC and likes to write poetry. Erin Larsen is freshman Business Management major at KSUTC. James Carlson is a sophomore at KSUTC who sees the whole establishment of literature as a lie. Kristen Evans is a KSU photojournalism major. Joseph Dudley is currently the English Coordinator at the Skills Center at KSUTC. James Hrusovsky is a former KSUTC student who now majors in English at the main campus.

Gary Baker is a sophomore English/Education major at KSUTC. Peggy Sue Byrnes writes poetry in her spare time. Gigi Danko is a recently graduated office technology major aspiring to be a computer dweeb. Carol E. Miller is the Hart Crane Award Winner from Oak Park, Illinois. G. Timothy Gordon is a poet from Sante Fe, NM. Walter Bargen writes his poetry in Ashland, MO. Phyllis Lomax Martin is an ex-KSUTC student turned entrepreneur. Jessica Sklar writes poetry in Ann Arbor, MI. Barbara Campbell teaches at Columbia College in Highland Park, Illinois. Ron Book is a KSUTC student who has been active in the theater.
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