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Anthony M. Krier, Jr.

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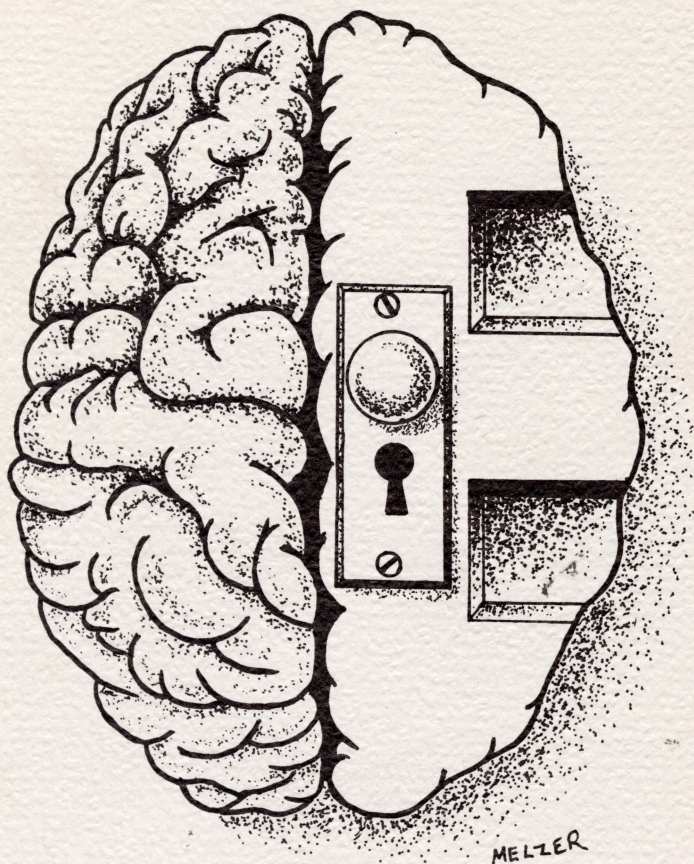
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THE RIGHT BRAIN REVIEW

Northeastern Illinois University's Literary Forum



Volume 1, Number 1

Winter, 1990

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A publication of the *Apocalypse literary arts coalition*

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Winter, 1990

Submission Guidelines

The *Apocalypse literary arts coalition* is now soliciting manuscripts for its Spring 1991 issue of *The Right Brain Review*, and is interested in poetry, short fiction, prose, and essays.

Do not examine previous issues in an attempt to discern the taste or biases of the editors. Send your best, most original work.

Submissions must be typed (dot matrix accepted) and double spaced. All margins should be one and one-half inches.

Contributor's notes are printed in each issue. To save correspondence time and paperwork, please enclose a short (150 words max.) biography, or a personal statement concerning you and your writing. Biographies will not be considered during the selection process.

Next Submission Deadline: February 28, 1990

Please include your name, address and a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you wish unaccepted submissions returned.

Send to: Editorial Staff
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Poets and authors interested in arranging readings for the *Apocalypse Reading Series* should send an information package: cassette tapes of platform style are appreciated. SASE if you wish the package returned.

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THE RIGHT BRAIN REVIEW

Fiction

WHO THE BOYS ARE

Jameson Currier

The dream begins at the beach. I am lying on a towel, my face toward the sun. It is hot. I am sweating. Near me, my friends Jeff and Robbie are throwing a frisbee to one another though they have never met. My dog Zero, dead since childhood, chases the waves. The water breaks in white curls, sounding suspiciously like bubbles in an aquarium. The sky, at first blue, is suddenly filled with gray clouds that swirl together like a hurricane. There is a flash of light and I open my eyes. The dream is over. The light above my bed is on. I can feel the white cotton gown sticking to my skin. The respirator above the bed gurgles. My father sits at the foot of the bed in a chair, reading a magazine. He notices I am awake. "Some boys were here to see you," he says. "They said they'd be back. Went to get something to eat." I close my eyes and fall asleep again.

* * *

I am awake when Adam and Vince enter the room. Though I have not been outside in what seems to be months, I know it

must be raining. Adam is wearing a tan raincoat. Vince carries a folding umbrella. They both lean over the bed, one at a time, and kiss me lightly on the cheek saying "Hello," "How are you?" The chairs scrape across the floor as they are rearranged so they can sit next to the bed. Adam places his hand on top of mine.

I don't listen at first. I just stare. Their dark hair, brown eyes, lean bodies the same height, so similar they appear to be brothers. But different: Adam's complexion lighter, his forehead broader; Vince's stubble of unshaven beard, hair peeking above the collar of his sweater. Adam slumps forward in the chair as he talks. When I listen he is describing the house they are buying in Pennsylvania, built in the 19th century and once the general store for a town with a population not much larger than this room. "The house is huge," he says. "Four bedrooms, two fireplaces, an attic, a cellar, a separate garage which we think we might turn into a studio or guest cottage." Vince, usually the quietest of us when we are together, today fills the awkward pauses politely, offering explanations directed to my father, "Near Scranton," "Three and a half hours," "Weekends."

Sometimes I worry Vince thinks I hate him. We started off awkward. I, confused, jealous, that Adam had a lover. He, confused, jealous, that I knew Adam better than he. I have known Adam since college, freshman year, when we met while taking art history. We shared an apartment off-campus for two years, discovered each other's preference for men during late night study breaks, explored the bars downtown, teased one another about the young men we brought home and spent a summer together in London. We moved to Manhattan, living in an apartment in the West Village: he to attend graduate school, I to start a job, both of us a friend to the other, each looking to find a lover.

My father tells Vince about a system which purifies well water. My father was always repairing, rebuilding our house

outside Atlanta. Two years ago, he sold the house and now lives in Florida.

A nurse enters and the chairs scrape across the floor again. She takes my temperature, my pulse and blood pressure and writes on the chart. I don't like this nurse, Thelma, she never has anything nice to say. Today she says "Nothing new," before she leaves. I look down at my left arm where she has left it on the bed. I hardly recognize it. The dark hair has turned light, the skin blotched red and gray, circles of blue bruises bigger than the lesions on my thigh. If I even think about moving my arm it hurts, amazed that something so thin can feel so heavy, almost as heavy as the white gown which presses so hard against my chest I think it must be trying to stop my breath. Suddenly I want nothing more than to go back to sleep.

* * *

Eric brings flowers and messages from work: Reva, our secretary, picked out the tulips, Don says hello and plans to visit, Frank the security guard is getting married in the summer, and Martin, our boss, wants to know what I think about a Friday night horror series, each comment expelled rapidly in his thin, breathless voice before his coat is off. Though I remember telling everyone to stop bringing me things, Eric always arrives with something. He pulls an enamel pin, shaped and painted in the design of a 1950s television set, from his coat pocket, flashes it in front of me like his smile and pins it to my gown.

He looks so healthy and winsome, dressed in a blue shirt, a red sweater vest and gray pleated pants. He introduces himself to my father and shakes his hand firmly. His strawberry colored hair, smooth, round face and light freckles make him look so innocent and boyish. For years he tried to look older so people would take him seriously. He grew a moustache that made his upper lip seem too wide, and then a beard that sprouted only in patches. He tried

wearing dark, tailored clothes to look more professional and thick, black plastic eyeglasses to look studious. Now they are gone and the contacts he wears brightens the color of his amber eyes. Now he is comfortable looking relaxed and youthful. At the television network where we work everyone, after seven years, is aware his intelligence and opinions are invaluable. He can zip off how many episodes of an old TV series were shot, naming the directors, stars and supporting cast without checking the reference files; he can read the script of a series pilot and tell why it won't work but how it can be made better. Once he saved my neck when I vetoed a suggestion for a comedy special televised live from a nightclub; though he thought it would work, he remembered another network had tried it and failed.

When I was admitted this time I refused to allow anyone to turn on the TV beside the bed. I didn't want to be reminded that I was missing work. And I didn't need the distraction; my roommate, a young man with a hacking cough, kept his set on all day, all night, the sound spilling above, below and around the heavy plastic partition which separated us. I was relieved when he left and the doctor decided to keep his bed empty.

Eric sits on the edge of the bed and slips an arm beneath my body. Swiftly, deftly, he lifts my head and shoulders and flips over my pillows, something he knows makes me happy when I asked him to do it the last time I was in the hospital.

I have always had a crush on Eric. Thanksgiving, the first year we met, we were walking together down Seventh Avenue after dinner. Eric had just broken up with his first lover and moved into an apartment in Chelsea. The sidewalk was slick from a rain which had just stopped, and everything about the city seemed suspended, briefly, in order to catch a breath. But Eric went on and on, his voice nasal from a cold, about what a rat his old boyfriend was. As we turned down his block, I caught the smell of wet pine from the trees roped together and leaning

against the wall of a building waiting to be sold for Christmas. It made me feel so special and yet lonely. His apartment, a railroad flat, was decorated as mine had been on those days: cardboard boxes disguised with sheets, painted wood fruit crates and threadbare chairs. We sat on his sofa drinking martinis, a new taste we had both acquired, and as I was trying to comfort him about his lover, we started to kiss. We rolled off the sofa, landed on the floor with a thump and laughed.

"Are we this crazy?" he asked.

"Desperate, you mean," I replied.

"It'll be OK" he says now while straightening the sheets of the bed, the same way he reassured me of my job when I was troubled by insecurities, the same way I remarked when he was disappointed about his broken relationship.

A doctor enters the room. My father stands up from his chair and the doctor places his hand on my father's shoulder. Eric leads my father out of the room. The doctor doesn't even read my chart. He presses his hands against my neck, underneath my arms, around my wrists, as though examining for broken bones. I don't like this doctor. I don't even know his name. He tells me he wants to take more blood. What can I do? More tests, more results, never any answers.

* * *

Another dream: I am swimming in the dark. A pool or maybe a lake. The water is thick and heavy but it feels good to be moving. My breathing is short and troubled but when I dive underneath and hold my breath it feels like I'm flying.

A white line separates the darkness. As it brightens I see a road speeding beneath me, a tunnel of trees on either side. When the road disappears I continue flying: over a lake, a field of wild flowers, then another road and then a mountain. I stop when I reach a crowd of faces. The only one I recognize is my mother. As

I touch her white hair it is bright again.

Awake, I am hungry, as though all my exercise, my dreaming has created an appetite. I haven't had any real food in weeks. Nutrition, a clear liquid, is pumped from a plastic bag through a tube connected to my vein.

My father stares at the view from the window, twelve floors above the East River. I have never seen this view, the blinds were closed when I arrived, and from where I lie I can only imagine what he sees: the slow barges on the water, the glint of light on cars crossing the bridge and the hollow windows of the subway train floating beneath, planes bisecting the horizon, a tipsy helicopter paused beside a building like a hummingbird before a flower. A view of motion, paths crossing, nothing connecting; if it does it's an accident or a disaster. I wish I could tell my father about my dream, that I saw my mother, but there is a raspy scratch at the back of my throat reminding me I cannot speak.

* * *

Jeff is here. He is late, he says, because he ran into my super and explained the faucet in the bathroom needed fixing. Jeff is the one who has taken care of me these last few months, though he was my best friend long before I got sick. He takes me to doctors, cleans my apartment, checks my messages and mail, and waters the plants so I don't have to worry. I worry anyway. I worry about the bills and the insurance and that this feeling of helplessness will never end. Last month, when I didn't have enough to pay the rent, Jeff called a list of my friends and asked each for \$50 to contribute toward the rent. Now I worry he will leave me, decide he's had enough of all this. The first time I was in the hospital he was always asking about my food and medicine. Had I eaten? Did I want anything special? What pill is that? How often do I need it? Once he yelled at me when a nurse brought me medication and when she left the room I dumped it into the trash.

"It hurts my stomach," I said. "But maybe there's something else you can try," he answered.

Jeff is the one who decorated my hospital room with tinsel and a tiny artificial Christmas tree, the green branches covered with silver ornaments and pale blue lights. He taped the Christmas cards to the wall and arranged a small party for me on Christmas Eve with presents and friends. Jeff is also the one who called my father. On Christmas Day, which I don't even remember, he told my father I was sick. He explained everything to him, as he told me later, in a calm, but precise manner. The next day my father was here, at the hospital, and I know Jeff was relieved not to have to make that other call, the one which would have begun, "Oh, you didn't know?"

Jeff brings the chair close to the bed and spreads the mail, which he has pulled from a plastic bag, across the white sheet. He holds each piece in front of me and says, "Bill," "Letter" or "Garbage" and sorts them into piles. He does this, I know, to show me my life still goes on, though if it gets any worse I have given him the power to end it. He reads me the letters out loud. Today there are two and a postcard. The postcard, a photo of giant ruby slippers beneath a palm tree, is from Paul, a friend who works at the video store on my block, who went to Hawaii for a vacation. One letter is actually a late Christmas card from Jackson, the mail boy at work, saying he is thinking of me. The other is from Robbie and as Jeff reads it I notice my father lean forward in his chair. My father always liked Robbie. In the summers he used to take us to the Okefenokee to canoe and spot alligators, something Robbie still does. I want to tell Jeff to stop reading, I already know about Robbie's life: his blonde wife, his two kids, his job as an economist for a bank. When he finishes reading it he hands it to my father, and then scoops up the mail, returning it to the plastic bag.

Jeff is the one I will miss most. I think this is hardest on him: my life interrupting his. He met my father at the airport, won't

let him lift a finger while he stays at my apartment, takes him out to dinner. Before my father arrived Jeff told me he took the magazines and videos I had on the top shelf of my closet over to his apartment. I feel so ashamed, I've nothing to give him, not even a voice to say thanks.

Jeff has always reminded me of summer, of chlorinated water, of white beaches and beautiful boys. In a way, he is an extension of the Robbie I knew as a kid, perhaps the reason why I was first attracted to him. Unclothed he has a swimmer's body. We met doing laps in the pool at the Y. His handsomeness immediately awed me: the broad shoulders, the thin waist, the high cheekbones and square jaw, stepping like someone I admired in a book or a magazine off the page and into my life. He works as a catalog designer and though he can afford to dress like the high-paid models he selects for photographs, he is usually simply dressed in a plain colored shirt, old jeans and sneakers.

Now, I can hear Jeff running the water at the sink. Soon, he is washing me with a warm cloth. He is not afraid to touch me like some of the nurses. My father watches Jeff's every stroke; I'm surprised he's not embarrassed at the affection between two boys. Though I can't smell my filth, my stench, because of the respirator, I can feel it on every pore of my body. My hair is matted; I want to shower, shave. But the cloth feels nice and Jeff quickly dries me with a clean towel after he has washed a portion of my skin, afraid I will become chilled. When he finishes he combs my hair lightly with the brush I keep in the drawer beside the bed.

"Better?" he says and though I cannot answer, I know he is too. All this action, movement, is calming for him. If he stopped for a moment he would become depressed, worried, scared. I know him. Now he begins to convince my father he should get something to eat. My father looks at me and then at Jeff, but Jeff is already at the door, waiting. "Rest," Jeff says to me and then to my father, "He can use the rest. You can use the food."

* * *

It must be hot in the room. Trey removed his jacket after only a few minutes, then his tie, then unbuttoned his shirt and rolled up the sleeves. The first time he visited me I could see the anxiety etched across his face; he was worried he could end up in this room, the predictions say he might.

Shivering, I feel another fever taking hold. My body doesn't seem able to shake the pneumonia this time. It's odd to be so cold in a room so hot and dry. Trey does not talk, he simply takes my hand and entwines our fingers together. I can still see him the night we met at Eric's party. It was April, two years ago and the windows were open, a breeze gently flipping the flames of a row of burning candles on a bookshelf. We were both holding drinks. There was something mysterious about him. Perhaps it was his dark, well-trimmed beard. Or the black eyes or the flat eyebrows which ran into one another at the bridge of his nose. We talked so long we left wet circles on the coffee table.

We were lovers after that first night. Every day I discovered something new about him: the grandson of Romanian immigrants, a stint teaching English in Portugal, a passion for cinnamon pancakes. When he left I wasn't surprised, after a year together he was still a mystery to me. He was so private and secretive I had not met any of his friends. He said I monopolized the relationship: we at restaurants I chose, went to movies I wanted to see, stayed at my apartment instead of his. I was inflexible and he was a puzzle.

The night I was diagnosed I called and left a message on his answering machine. "Murderer," I said and hung up. I don't know why I did it; I don't blame him. There were others. Maybe I wanted to jolt something so the pieces would fall together. Maybe I wanted to hurt him the way he had hurt me when he left.

Now Trey's eyes are glassy. Any minute I think he might cry. But he seems fine when my father and Jeff walk into the room. Jeff

* * *

and Trey hug one another and then Jeff introduces Trey to my father. They shake hands and there is an awkward, silent pause. If I could talk I would yell at them, "Go home. There's nothing else you can do."

My father reads a magazine, stares out the window, watches and listens to the boys come and go. Minutes go by that are as long as days. The days pass, blurring into one another. I know he must be full of questions: How did this happen? Why to my son? Such fine looking young men, why aren't they married?

My mother said I had his looks at an early age: his wavy hair, the dimple in his chin, his wide brow, his straight lips, his hazel eyes, his aquiline nose. I know my father must be shocked to see his son, barely thirty, looking older than himself. My sunken eyes, my mottled skin, what hair I have left from chemotherapy now white.

His parents, my grandparents are dead. My mother died of cancer three years ago. He had only one son, only one child. All the blood he has left lies in this bed. I want to tell him so much before I fall asleep again, before the dreams do not disappear. I love you and please don't hate me . . . I love you and please understand that I didn't tell you because I thought you might be angry or disappointed in me . . . I love you and I don't want to die . . . I love you and I always wanted to explain my life but was afraid it would hurt you . . . I love you and I want to tell you who these boys are. A moment before sleep I feel sure he will understand. I am his only son, his only child. I am him. And these boys are me . . .

* * *

CAT'S GAME

Brian Skinner

For William Claude Dukenfield

Laid out before him in zig-zag fashion, Timothy saw his next moves so clearly that he found it hard to sit still and wait for his turn. The old man must not have noticed, for his move was of no consequence and did nothing to upset the clever strategy by which the boy had ensnared him. He seemed not to notice the trap.

One, two, three—Timothy skipped his red checker across the board, scooped up his spoils and announced in a voice loudened by his pent-up enthusiasm, "King me!"

The old man turned around from his sideways, almost indifferent posture and faced the situation bravely. He had long given up letting the boy win just for some amusement. Now he had to fight to win. Only his heart had not quite been in this particular game.

"Well, well. Who taught you to play like that, my boy?" he

asked. "Positively brilliant."

"You did, Mr. Wilcox," the boy said.

"And is that any way to repay the kindness and patience of your teacher?" the old man asked.

"Yep," the boy announced flatly.

"Well, you're not one to mince words, are you, Tim?"

"Nope."

"Good," the old man smiled.

"Your move, Mr. Wilcox," Timothy reminded him.

"All right. Let's not get pushy. A hasty move is usually a blunder," he said. Then he turned sideways in his chair again, leaning his arm over the back of it, and stared down the alley as if a remedy might be read in the pattern of pop-bottles and candy-wrappers on the concrete squares.

Timothy had his next move already lined up—if the old man didn't ruin it—and another one in reserve. He didn't think Mr. Wilcox was throwing him the game, but the old man wasn't giving it his best shot either. It would be more fun if the old man finished up with his thinking first and then played the game in earnest.

The old man eventually faced himself forward, studying the checkerboard with his chin on his palm and his fingers tapping his cheek. There was a neat row of round little impressions running up the inside of his arm where the chrome tacks of the old kitchen chair had dug in. Timothy thought it looked like his arm was coming unbuttoned, but kept quiet about it.

"How's that?" Mr. Wilcox moved one of his last three checkers, and lost it a second later.

In the next turn Timothy had his second king, and he and the old man both knew it was over then, but played it to the last.

"Two out of three?" the boy asked.

"Fine," Mr. Wilcox said. "But not until I get something to

assuage the powerful thirst that has come upon me. You set 'em up and I'll get us something to drink. What'll you have, my boy?"

"A beer," Timothy said.

"May I see some i.d.?" the old man laughed. "Seems you may be just a dozen or so years under-age."

Timothy showed him the joker from the poker deck, set aside from an earlier game.

"Well . . ." the old man paused, scrutinizing it thoughtfully, "it does seem to bear some resemblance." He then worked his way across the rather rickety third-floor porch and let the kitchen screen-door slam shut behind him. There was a muffled reprimand from Mrs. Wilcox somewhere inside.

Timothy set up the checkerboard but was short one piece—one of his, a red one. It should have stood out clearly against the battleship-gray porch boards, but it was not to be found. Slowly and cautiously he shuffled to the wobbly railing of the porch. He didn't like being up that high and having to look down. It made his stomach queasy. But there—sure enough—in the oily mud and debris of the mechanic's lot next door was a perfectly round, perfectly red dot. The mechanic's German shepherd, Old Mike, gaped up at him and dared him to try something. Timothy slunk away from the bannister, crawling on hands and knees, afraid he would topple over and fall into the next yard if he stood up. Mr. Wilcox came back onto the porch, failing to catch the screen-door before it slammed again.

"Lose something?" he asked.

"Yep," Timothy said, looking up. "One of the red checkers."

"Well, it's got to be here," Mr. Wilcox said. "We'll look for it."

"I already found it, Mr. Wilcox," the boy said, sheepishly. "Old Mike's got it."

"Well, we can kiss that one good-bye then, eh?" the old man

frowned.

"Yep, I guess so," the boy said.

Mr. Wilcox took the bottle-opener from its nail in one of the mortar joints and pried the two caps up. "Here's your missing checker," he said, clicking one of the bottle-caps down on the empty square.

Timothy frowned. The gold Meister Brau cap did not match the other checkers and he complained that he'd get all mixed up and probably lose the game.

"Want to trade?" the old man asked him.

"You always go first, Mr. Wilcox. You know. Smoke before fire," Timothy said.

"You're a hard man to please," Mr. Wilcox said. He groaned and got up from the checker table and went back into the apartment. He caught the screen-door on the way in, but had forgotten himself by the time he came back out. Mrs. Wilcox's voice was an octave shriller this time.

Mr. Wilcox had a bottle of his wife's brightest red nail polish concealed in his fist. He proceeded to give the gold bottle-cap a couple of coats of the nail polish and blew on it to hurry along the drying. His mouth dried out from this effort and he was required to take several long swallows of beer. Timothy took two quite tentative sips in the meantime. He was not about to admit that the escaping gas bothered his nose and that the brew had a musty flavor like the smell of the air in the basement.

The boy registered his alarm when the old man unscrewed the cap of the bottle of polish to give it a third coat.

"She'll never miss it," the old man assured him. "She's got enough paint to do all the horses on a carousel."

They laughed, but not too loudly. She might hear them, and laughter always bothered her because it sounded like conspiracy.

The old man saw that Timothy was not getting very far with

his bottle of beer and offered to trade. His own bottle was nearly empty, on account of all the puffing and blowing he had to do. Timothy had no objection to the trade and was, in fact, sorry he hadn't settled for his customary glass of iced raspberry Kool-Aid.

The red bottle-cap was soon put into service. They were pretty far along in the game—and Mr. Wilcox seemed to be doing better because he was concentrating this time—when the slamming of the screen-door and the rumbling of the porch startled them. Mrs. Wilcox had come out to shake her dust-mop over the porch railing. She had an iron grip on the handle and shook it with such vigor and fury that it was evident she could do real damage if she set her mind to it.

Timothy watched her sternly-pursed lips and saw the beads of sweat flecking her face. She always wore her make-up, even to do the housework. That came from her working at the Maybelline factory, he supposed. And since she was always complaining how stingy they were with benefits, she made the maximum use of her employee discount, and the maximum use of the products she got with it. Mr. Wilcox was right about being able to paint the carousel horses. She had enough cosmetics on her dressing-table and on shelves and in shoeboxes to paint every ride and attraction at Riverview in the full regalia of its garish carnival colors. The stuff must be waterproof too, for the streams of sweat seemed to glide right over it like water did over the best porch enamel.

Mrs. Wilcox turned around from her throttling of the mop and instantly spotted the bottle of nail-polish on the cluttered card-table.

"What's that doing out here?" she demanded.

Mr. Wilcox pointed meekly, but grinningly to the fiery-red bottle-cap which he had captured from the boy.

"Next time you'll ask my permission first," she told him. "Do

you know what they charge for that at Sully's?"

"But you didn't buy any of it at Sully's," Mr. Wilcox said.

"So? Is that a reason to be extravagant with it. Painting bottle-caps!" she huffed. "I paid for that in blood, sweat and tears—dearer than money."

"Let's leave Mr. Churchill out of this one," Mr. Wilcox said.

"Boy, getting pretty smart-mouthed, aren't we?" she said. "A fine example you're setting for the boy."

Timothy was trying to be as nonchalant as possible, but was nervously acting as if nothing was happening, which only drew attention to it. He up-ended the bottle of Meister Brau and drank down the thin film of beer Mr. Wilcox had left him at the bottom.

"What's this?" Mrs. Wilcox demanded of her husband. "Are you crazy?"

She flung down the mop as if it were a challenge and hovered over the card-table with her beefy hands on her even beefier hips.

"Well?" she asked, but did not allow time for a reply. "Do you want the boy's parents to sue us for every nickel we've got? Have you ever heard of the charge of contributing to the delinquency of a minor? Are you crazy? Well? What have you got to say for yourself?"

The color of her complexion shone through her make-up. It was suddenly all rouge and now powder.

Mr. Wilcox smiled and leaned back in the chair.

"He asked for some," the old man said. "I mean, he didn't have enough to turn a fly off course. It's not helping a kid by making everything mysterious and forbidden, you know."

"No, I don't know," she said. "I leave the philosophy to Mr. Einstein. And you, young man," she turned to Timothy, "I expect you'll have enough common sense in the future to refuse this old fool's debauches and depravities. If not, I will forbid you to come up here any more. I'll have a talk with your parents. Understood?"

Timothy nodded. Mr. Wilcox nodded, without being addressed, apparently for good measure. Mrs. Wilcox turned around again at the screen-door and remonstrated about the old man's slamming it again, threatening to fine him a nickel every time he did so. She'd be able to retire in the lap of luxury, she said.

Mr. Wilcox and Timothy looked at one another, at their trembling fingers, and at the unfinished game. A thin layer of dust had settled over the checkerboard and the checkers, for the next move left behind a discernible shiny black circle where the checker had been. It ended up a cat's game, and they could have chased one another around the board for hours without either of them coming any closer to winning.

2.

Timothy had not seen Mr. Wilcox in over a week and was growing very bored with himself. The boy's mother had told him that Mr. Wilcox was not feeling very well and it would be best not to disturb him. At the supper-table that night there was an uneasy silence between Timothy's parents that told him something was up. They took turns suggesting various things he might do—most of them in the way of extra chores—to alleviate the month of ponderous time he had remaining before the start of first grade. He was already assigned one duty to take care of after supper—to bundle up the week's newspapers from the living room and haul them down to the bin by the boiler room. After that there would be dishes on the drainboard for him to dry.

"I'll carry the papers, but could you go down there with me, Daddy?" Timothy asked. "It's gotten very spooky down there lately."

His mother suddenly dropped the bowl of peas and they rolled every which way across the table as the three of them scrambled to keep any peas from rolling off. Timothy had heard the expression about spilling the peas before—or was it beans—and now he was actually getting to witness it. His mother looked frightfully pale.

"I suppose we'd better tell him, Margaret," his father said. "He already seems to have a sense of something."

"Don't be ridiculous," his mother said. "How do you explain suicide to a six-year-old."

Timothy suspected the drains might be backing-up again.

"I don't know, Margaret. As best we can, I suppose. I don't think it's right to keep it from him, after all."

The boy's mother grew more nervous, and gave her hands something to do at the sink. His father set down his utensils on the half-laden plate and turned to face his son.

"Mr. Wilcox is dead, Tim," he said, keeping a silence afterwards.

The boy said nothing, and kept looking into his father's face. He knew what death was. It happened to Mulligan the cat. They had to bury him in a cardboard box and he never came back, not even for a bowl of cream or his girlfriend Daisy.

"It happened last Sunday, Tim. Funerals are for adults. We didn't want to upset you. You and Mr. Wilcox were pretty good friends."

"We still are," the boy said.

"Yes," his father said, and the word stuck in his throat a little. "Only Mr. Wilcox is in heaven now and you'll have to wait a while to get to see him again."

"Did he die in the basement?" Timothy

His father was startled by the boy's insight, or whatever it was, and had to struggle with that simple word again.

"Yes, Tim," he said. "Mr. Wilcox killed himself, Tim. I don't want you to hear it later from somebody else who'll get it all twisted around. Killing yourself is a bad thing, but Mr. Wilcox was a good man. Do you understand that, Tim?"

"Sure," the boy said. "He told me everybody's good, only sometimes it's hard to find it."

"That's right, Tim."

"But why did he do it?" the boy asked. "Was he real sad about something?"

"Well, you see, Tim, a man's work is very important to him. Sometimes it's all he's got. And Mr. Wilcox lost his job."

"Did he do something bad? Did he get fired?"

"No, nothing like that, Tim. The factory was closing. And he was afraid to tell Mrs. Wilcox."

"I know," the boy said. "She scares me too. She could scare the pants off a statue."

"It's not nice to talk about grown-ups that way, Tim."

"Mr. Wilcox did," he said.

"Well, his mouth sometimes got him into trouble too. Now, come on. Do you want me to go down to the boiler room with you?"

"No, that's okay, Daddy. It won't be so spooky now that I know who it is."

"Who what is, Tim?" his father asked.

"The funny feeling, that's all. I'm okay." Timothy left the table and collected the newspapers, grabbing a bundle under each arm, and consequently letting the screen-door slam behind him.

"See?" the boy's father said quietly. "He's a great little trooper. It's best to be honest with kids."

Timothy's mother remained unconvinced. "We'll see," she said, "who answers his screams from a nightmare. You'd probably sleep through it if the building collapsed." And she went about

sweeping the floor for peas.

3.

A few days later Timothy was down by the boiler room again, rummaging through the trash cans like he and Mr. Wilcox used to do. Surprisingly useful and wonderful things always turned up. He suspected that the wire milk-crate he was standing on was the one Mr. Wilcox had kicked from under himself when he hanged himself from the big boiler pipe. Nobody said how Mr. Wilcox did it, but Timothy knew he hadn't liked guns.

"Why not?" Timothy had asked him.

"Because, my boy, I'd commit murder the first night it was in the house."

And Timothy didn't see why you would have to go down to the basement to drink poison. It was elementary, like when he and Mr. Wilcox used to figure things out like Holmes and Watson. Yep. Sure enough. One of the wash-lines was missing.

Suddenly, Timothy started crying while dangling over one of the metal drums. It felt to him like the crying would never stop and he'd fill up the whole barrel with tears—and the whole boiler room and the whole entire basement—like the sorcerer's apprentice, and it wouldn't stop till he drowned. But it did stop, for he spied at the side of the trash can the taped-up box with the checkerboard and the checkers and the painted bottle-cap in it.

"Now why'd she go and throw that out?" he said aloud. "It's still perfect. People don't know what they've got till it's gone," he added, quoting Mr. Wilcox.

He wiped his tear-soaked face with his dirty hands until it created permanent shadows. He dried off the lid of the checker-

box too. Then he set up the board atop the milk-crate and positioned the checkers. He drew the two other milk crates up to the arrangement. As a sudden inspiration, he fetched two Meister Brau bottles from the bottle-bin and set them alongside.

"Smoke before fire," he chuckled in a deep voice. Then he jumped around to the other crate, and in his own voice, he said, "Don't I ever get to go first?"

Back on the other side, the falsely booming voice said "Okay, my boy, this one last time. Fire before smoke, ha, ha!"

Timothy was getting a little tired of hopping from one side of the checkerboard to the other after a move, and his throat was getting a little sore from imitating Mr. Wilcox in both tone and volume, but the most exhausting task was trying not to cheat.

All at once the basement door burst open and in barged Mrs. Wilcox with her laundry basket out front like a wicker pot-belly. She was sweating and puffing. She looked at Timothy and the set-up he had made, and—almost instantly—the sheet-white color of her face shone through the Maybelline and she collapsed as if she was suddenly unstarched, hitting her forehead on the cement wash-tub.

Timothy ran for help, and the game of checkers was never finished. It was a cat's game anyway.

The bump on Mrs. Wilcox' forehead never quite went away. Her make-up managed to camouflage the persistent color of it, but the contour was never quite disguised.

Timothy always told anyone who cared to listen—which was anyone he could snare, like it or lump it—that the knot on Mrs. Wilcox' forehead was where the ghost of Mr. Wilcox whacked her one for being such a bitch.

Naturally enough, when word of this tale reached home, Timothy got his first taste of Ivory soap, and even raspberry Kool-Aid could not wash away the lingering, bitter sting.

bump, noun (seventh definition): one of the protuberant lumps on the skull which are associated, by phrenologists, with distinct traits of character.

THE RIGHT BRAIN REVIEW

Poetry

Grandmother's Bed

Between white ironed sheets
on the double bed one night,
her back arched in his
ministerial hands. He had
probably turned out the light,
put his book aside.

This was after prayers,
before her knees became arthritic,
before my mother was conceived,
before those daughters
ballooned from grandmother's womb
into voices of their own
and so swiftly their skirts
belled into marriage and they
were gone.

No, that's not true. Her back
didn't arch. He tensed,
as his later photographs,
his place in the tent

of ironed sheets a holy
institution, mindful that it is
better to marry than burn.
Perhaps even love held
the devil's laughter.
They retired together at night
to a cool room, and even in sleep
don't get mussed.

But perhaps one night,
perhaps, she did arch her back.
Perhaps his hands came
out of that photograph
to touch her, and it was
not a prayer, not an idea.
Perhaps she loved him
long before he grew stout,
and long after, her love
and her duty one.

Barbara Van Noord

6 A.M., Going South

On 91 near Springfield the mist has holes.
Through them a cameo of billows and blue,
phantom mountains behind the Marriott.
I remember I dreamed of my mother,
again in a house I've seen only in dream,
again with rummaged boxes and bare walls
as if she had moved in a long time ago
but never bothered to unpack.
Years pass while she lives in this house.
I forget she died twenty years ago
and wonder how I could let time pass
without seeing her. We look together
at a family portrait, formal, as in Sunday
best, but the picture is an x-ray.
We smile in our bones, elegant and arranged,
each with a spot of death on our lungs.
We examine the skeletons for a long time
sitting on the bed between plain white walls
and stacks of old photographs. My mother's
hair is still waved and black. She points,
mute, a presence in the thick of sleep
when clouds part and I walk through holes
to find her casually living there
among household clutter as though
all these things are of little importance
and death is simply another photo
in an old album of family life.

Barbara Van Noord

Sciatica

It stung my leg like a sniper's bullet.
Frantic, I limped to Dr. Soon
and watched him unroll
an ancient stargazer's chart.
Constellations like the seven Pleiades
were, in fact, acupuncture
points, linking the
stars to the center of the
universe. And the back of my right leg.
Pain has a definite high and
low—a yin and a yang flow. But
I only felt its hardset jaw.
The session ended. The doctor said little.
He locked his pride in an ivory
case with his shiny needles.
Then sat down in lotus position,
and calmly opened the Wall Street Journal.

Gertrude Rubin

Sitting Shiva

After her death, a clock spun
crazily, waking me at 1:33 a.m.
Time to pick a casket, arrange
her funeral, watch gravediggers
strike a layer of clay. Time
to go home, and *sit shiva*.

A door opened, as earth did for her.
Sounds of laughter, voices, music.
Someone grabbed my wrist, waltzed me
down a hall blazing with mirrors,
chandeliers of one hundred candles.
Past tables laden with cakes, crimson
apples, dried fruits and nuts. Eyes
of love, of solace, followed me.
Every touch was a blessing. A strange
contentment warmed my bones.

At midnight, all music stopped.
I stood alone in a bare hovel.
Straw walls, hard clay floors. No air,

windows, or light. Only one candle
in a tall red glass, flickering.
Brave as a heart, it fibrillated
for seven days. Then, like the pulse
of life, melted down to fiery
wick in a pool of wax. I saw again
her dry lips, ash-blackend tongue.
I remembered splashing them with water.
I remembered, my mother was dead.

Gertrude Rubin

*Shiva, (or shiba): the traditional period of mourning observed in Jewish homes
after a relative's funeral*

Adrift

the river is lost
in the bluegrey
haze of our city.

we drift
away from ourselves.

the sound of a train
is like the fury
of the sun,

a smudge of red.

Joe Banford

The Hidden

the sun is raving
mad through the city
corroding inebriate
minds, blinding children
with unwashed hair
dressed in dull colors
who just want to sleep;
they are fugitives
from his blaze
lying in each other's arms
in the shade of rotting stone
hanging their heads
picturing the yellow halo
of an aching moon

Joe Banford

For Chet Baker

song tingles my skin
like the night
of a room where I lie
wondering

about the land
of neon, the eternity
of our distance,
& the people who get high
from their flow of pain.

I wonder
about the human angels
who look through me,
the image
I want to smash,
the hours clenching my heart
like a desperate hand,

& the punctuation
of my life
fading like the soft
sorrow of your trumpet
into darkness.

Joe Banford

THE CHILD

It is an eight year old's
Sunday night with Mom.
Standing in the kitchen, light
shining from the long florescent tube
above the stainless steel sink
gives the room a stark white
blue glow.

We melt the forty peices of Kraft caramel
over the double boiler.
The mixture, stodgy and reassuring
as we dip the crisp green apples,
lay them to rest on the wax paper.

Mom speaks, tired
from some silent weight.
She is remote from her task,
the one she said
would be so much fun.

The air is thick
like the melted caramel,
and I am stuck
with knowledge I should not have.

I know where Dad is tonight
and I no longer feel
like a child.

Andrea Potos

RETURNING, WITHOUT HIM

I take a Sunday sunlit walk
along this same trail
embraced by oak and elm.
The past
falls like crimson leaves
off these autumn trees, lounges
on the greasy slope leading down
to a pebbled shore.

I lie down with it and wonder
how many blooms and deaths
have happened since that night in June,
how the earth carries on
without longing or remorse.

Andrea Potos

THE SECOND WIFE

She shuts down, hides inside
clouds from her cigarettes
while her elder husband smiles
at a past his daughters recall.

A spectator
to June vacations at the beach,
fresh fruit pies on Sundays,
singing on the road
to Grandma's,
she knows
the future can't compensate
for the history
never owned.

Andrea Potos

THE WEEDS

Gypsy Moths spiral wildly in the air
and wind their way around trees that bear
the scars of their frightful appetite.
The gauze heat of July has fallen on
damp and overgrown grass; we wait
for a grey pall to lift from the sky.
Gardeners pause to study the light and
leave their work for the rain, content
with the mild solace they have found.

In the backyard, old wounds have begun
to heal. Torn ground and ragged roots
exposed in plumbing repair are gilded by
time's own grudges. Hardened mud forms
ruts where a garden might have been,
disrupts low ridges of pachysandra.
Honeysuckle, once dense with sweet buds,
succumbed to my landlord's painful
boredom. He hacked them down, hoping

to tame their boundless growth. Now

Inkberry raises its shameless stalk and
pokes through buckled slate. Stubbled weeds
run rampant where the softest grass
once grew. Nameless weeds with no flowers
to soothe a tired eye grow to staggering
heights in the woods. They congregate
in serene beds of perennials
that my neighbor has carefully tended

between our yards. High as flags,
tense as the spokes of Churchyard gates,
the weeds have settled in my small
domain with a lusty green vengeance.
The sour funk of their fragrance mocks
the scent of their pampered brethren.
Inflamed, they rub in the wind and taunt
the most confident among us: nothing is
ordained in this, your Eden.

Mindy Kronenberg
7/27-30/88

THE UNVEILING

The sky was the color of milk and ash
and our steps were slow and close,
mindfull of the earth's pull.
In the raw air we clung to each other
in our bruised colors, a dark procession
along the narrow cemetary roads
to my grandfather's plot.
The headstone was draped in plain cloth
secured by small rocks found
in the dirt near his grave.

Trees swung around us in a wind
that threatened rain, and we huddled
to hear the Rabbi's words slip
like dried leaves to the ground—
the names and places recalled
as if an ancestral psalm.
We stood against time—great aunts
and uncles, middle aged cousins

cuddling the newest generation—

To say goodbye. In a sleight-of-hand
the cloth fell away and the stone
appeared. As memory rose
in the place of flesh
my young niece came into view:
her tiny fists craddled
in each of her father's palms,
taking her first awkward steps
against the earth until

something divined her to stand alone.

Mindy Kronenberg

IN WOODEN WATCH

Mary tried to make light of her husband's dream
as he spoke of it in halting whispers
through the misty veil that hung
around the stillness of the great bed.

The veil hung like the lingering shade of a son
who likes to play soldier.
Willie and his friends has used a log for cannon
and the roof sometimes served as a fort
—or a ship's deck.

But when the children fired a real gun
from an upstairs porthole of The White House
the war games were suspended.

To celebrate the end of conflict
Mary took up the theme.
She planned her most ambitious party
fashioned after the decorative theme of war.
The soldiers and their belles feasted through a ton
—of turkey, of venison, of duck—
—of pheasant, of partridge, of ham—
of dressed game surrounded by a sugar model of Fort Sumter.

The frigate Union, made of nougats
sailed heavily, nearby on a stand
supported by cherubs and water nymphs
in a fountain that sprayed spun sugar.

And as the guests nibbled on cannon balls
—their son lay dying.

The reconnaissance to Willie's room
was reassuring as Mary mopped his fevered brow.
The worst was in the morning.
While the newspapers sang of the cherubs,
Willie struggled for one more breath.
His father was in and out
to pat the quilt on the rasping chest.
But finally, after a long siege
the father had to lift the quilt
—one last time
to cover his son's face.
Lincoln said:
"It is hard hard to have him die!"

Black spun-sugar crepe hung in somber folds
from The White House masts
as the cortege moved so slowly through the battlements.
Flags at half-mast hung limp in the still air.
Fireworks flashed over the Potamac.
Rockets exploded in peace.
But Willie would no longer move wooden soldiers
to their appointed positions
on the colorful fields of the quilt.
The war was over.

In the everlasting requiem that followed

Lincoln dreamed
of a deathlike stillness around him
broken by subdued sobs.
He left his bed and wandered
from room to lighted room
without seeing a living person

—even though the objects were forever familiar.

The night seemed endless
as he walked in stealth
into a lowering dawn.

When he reached the East Room
he saw a catafalque
upon which a corpse
wrapped in funeral vestments rested.
Soldiers stood in wooden watch
around a mahogany coffin
while an endless line passed:
some staring coolly, others clutching
lilac clusters to their breasts, sobbing.

He sadly viewed the changing of the guard
then to a sentry
whispered gently:

“Who is dead in The White House?”

Beverly G. Merrick

STORM ON THE INLAND SEA

Ahoy! The prairie schooners take sail
on the oceanic verge of the prairie
creaking with the heavy cargo
enough to sustain a crew
for a 40-day voyage
through the wilderness sea.

A late spring storm
blows in from the southeast
pelting ice bullets from a pirate sky.
The crew battens down the hatches
as the yellowcaps of prairie grass
roil in the high wind.
The buffaloes scatter like whales.

Beverly G. Merrick

WHEN GRANDPA DIED IN NEBRASKA

The rollaway rolled out
of the living room into the shed.

The soiled recliner went off
in the pickup to the dump.

Uncle Burdette put a padlock
on the leaning outhouse.

Uncle Malvern claimed the chair
at the head of the kitchen table.

The seven-day Black Forest Cuckoo
wound down—in seven days.

Dust collected on the German Bible
under the long-wave radio shelf.

Grass grew high around
the rusting garden plow.

The row of eternal irises
withered and browned.

A young child sat listening
to Grandma talk about the sodhouse prairie
and about the time the tornado
took all that they owned.

The dubbed ersatz comments
of German soldiers on Combat*
rang hollow
without the echoing laughter

from the eaves of the gray-shingled
tar-paper shoulder

when Grandpa died.

Beverly G. Merrick

* *Combat*: a T.V. show about troops in World War II.

the suicide

he said:

no, not the marbleized psychiatrist
hunchbacked with the weight of the couch
speaking in a tape recorded voice
and freudian tongue

not the social worker
wearing a necklace of cliches
eyes walking a tightrope
between the yes and the no
checking off the laundry list
of traumas, fears, suspicions

not the soiled group therapy
where words play ring-around-a-rosy
where griefs and agonies are scattered
like pomegranate seeds

not the brisk hand-scrubbing surgeon
whose fingers are agile and knowing

as a gambler's or a magician's
but who cannot excise
the cancer of loneliness, the pistules of guilt
cannot prescribe the miracle mix
for the fever of madness
the pain of being unloved

he said:

only death, the good physician
whose office is the world
who makes house calls day or night
bringing a corsage of silence and sleep:

helplessly he told me
death is my healer.

Hannah Alexander

slipping away: state hospital

she says again and again
"whenever I move, something jangles."

prisoner of invisible locks,
she fears a tremor of hand
or arm, toe, or curl of hair
will break open unhealed scars
or bite into bleeding wounds.

frozen, using not even her eyes
but guarding all they contain of pain
the little knives of living
will not pierce her
and the great slow swords of love
will not slash at her heart

her mind, emptied of its furniture
listens to the clanging echoes
within that plundered space:

falling, she slips away
into the halls where triple doors
are shut upon reality
and the sign reads: no visitors allowed

in a drowning voice, she whispers
again and again
"whenever I move, something jangles."

Hannah Alexander

Mary Shelley Learns of Her Husband's
Illigitimate Child by Their Maid Elise

You weary me, Percy;
a man I once saw as Prometheus,
now merely Jupiter of the boudoir:
Harriet, me, Claire, Elise.
The only difference between you and Byron—
he paints no water colours of souls mingling
while you sing to each new pair of ears
of soaring to heaven until boredom
clatters you back to earth.

This time there's a child,
palmed off as our coachman's,
a rogue you'll have to reckon with
even if you pay him to stay quiet.

Was it for heart-break
after our little Clara died,
the need to make new seed bloom,
no matter what ground it was dropped in?
Or because I turned from you,

when you grew tired of grieving?
Or had you finally wearied of Claire,
my step-sister who tunes her nerves
higher than a violin?

Even she was preferable to Elise,
who will abandon this child
faster than you chiseled your way free
of the Carrarra grief in my heart.
Go carouse with Byron, cavort with Claire;
I'm cold as my mother's grave,
where I toppled for your blazing eyes,
your poet's tongue: my thighs blood-dark,
my stomach hammering guilt
I was too giddy to hear.

Robert Cooperman

Percey Bysshe Shelley After the Death of His
Grandfather, 1815

With that inheritance
I can return to the lodgings
where I left Mary,
can stop slipping from cheap hotel
to coffee house to back alley.
Not least, I can untie my wife
from my neck with an annuity.
Bless the old pirate,
even in his dotage twice the man
as my timid father; "Timothy!"
the perfect name for him,
genuflecting to every tyranny
of society and convention.

How suddenly miraculous London is,
a city bathed in sunshine;
delightful to tramp its streets,
to glance at shop windows,
stride into book stalls
and put down shillings and pounds

from my own purse for a volume
that glitters with wisdom and beauty,
to walk freely with Mary,
genius dripping honey from her lips;
her mind dazzling, gorgeous
as the Muses dancing on Parnassus.

How I long to take her to Paris,
the literary salons will salute her,
applaud me for my discovery,
far greater than if Aphrodite
were found in a garret on the Left Bank,
tittering at the boastings
of would-be demi-gods.

Robert Cooperman

Something To Agree On

Strange, how memory works—
yours, of a day drenched
in the coldest rain
that ever penetrated
a father's unfilled grave;
mine, of a sky mockingly blue,
so bright we might not
have been standing, listening
to words meant to console,
but could have been walking
in crisp autumn woods,
leaves fluttering—tame birds;
our cheeks rosey with exercise,
laughter flying, brothers
living states apart,
glad for the time together.

Instead, I remember an aunt
digging her head into my back
and sobbing, recall tossing
a shovelful of earth

onto his coffin,
the thud so heavy
I knew there was no hope.

You remember thinking
it was all a joke
he was playing: almost sure
you spied his lovely,
smiling face pop up
from a distant tombstone—
his way of getting
the whole family together.

How we would have laughed,
had he sauntered out
dusting off his sports coat,
something to agree on
in later years.

Robert Cooperman

AT THE MUSEUM, Merrida, Mexico

Our Mayan tour guide keeps scratching
in a place
from which we women
avert our eyes.
Pointing to charts and sketches,
he shows us things
we never learned in Biology:
Mayan mothers flattened their infants' foreheads
so they could carry burdens,
dangled stones
between their eyes
so they'd cross
in beauty.

Hearing my gasp,
the guide turns
and swats my bleached curls.
His eyes weigh my breasts.
His pause asks,
are American daughters any different?
Imitating Jane Fonda's bulimia

so they can kick their legs high
and step one-two
into the crevices of men's eyes?

Near my feet,
carved bricks from the Uxmal ruins
still offer remnants of mauves and ambers.
20,000 years.
From this dark corner,
another era flickers.

Our guide
resumes his lecture,
scratching.

Marsha Caddell

Behind The JFK Eye

When Irish orbs were smiling the
American saga a bootlegger's royal descent

How much is Dublin whiskey these days?

A pint to take you on St. Patrick's Day
parades, a ride to the state store
Thanksgiving feast unwinding, did the
mob do it? and Castro gets his
wish 90 miles from our shores, brains

splatter grassy knolls and make Polish
sausage look good, to those dead eyes on the
way to heaven, if the mouth no longer speaks, the
Berlin threat, squealing pigs in the bay hysteria
then for the love of god cut his windpipe
minister the last rites
lost coronations

they dull, dinner plates losing gloss,
fluid baseballs cool,
jellies you don't spread on Wonder.
Yet the man would speak.
He knows now.

Catholics build their Pope tunnels in pink
and writhing coil
asp to nave
candle to homily, the
rise of St. Peter's Cathedral, look up

and the weight and majesty of God is there,
the weight and majesty of God
a gothic dream, stained glass to frantic

windows in Greek boats, blondes
who saunter and swivel, to get in her
bed, Marilyn the cream dream, soft
bodies that never quit but to doze

sleep forever.

How was she Jack?

Your mouth open, your
head inclined, would those pretty
iris still invoke last thoughts
flaring pain, brittle bone, how
many woman you made,
yet we cry.

You were young and turned us on, all
the way to meltdown, in the mist of alarmists,
the bear hugs, the Dallas
triggers, for you
we made love to the country.

Our rope in your teeth,
always swimming to shore,
the torch to pass on,
we see light in green lamp
shades when
we thought you had our
hope now you have us by the balls
like yours the life drained out of, their
secret beckoning still
sheep for the call of lost
sheperds,
we hear you honey.
The missiles haven't got us yet.

Joanne M. Marinelli

Hannah

The body, sending invitations
to new life each month, remained
an empty gourd, a small dying.
I made vows, possibly foolish ones,
but vows cannot be ignored.
This child, of cultivated hope, was torn
out like a second heart.

Samuel,
don't cling so. I dare not keep you
longer. Gods can be kind. You are
my sacrifice to them. Burn brightly
there as all unblemished lambs, be
peaceful as any dove.
The pain be mine.

Lillie D. Chaffin

OH DR. FREUD

He dropped into sleep, his feet propped
as comfortably as a Victorian gentleman,
his *Mittag* still warm and savory in his stomach,
so he dreamed. A smile played upon his lips,
but we will never know the deliciousness
of that last fancy, for he woke as gutted,
gnarled and charred as a stump struck by God
in the *Wienerwald*.

The women called to cleanse him
never feared his vacant gaze.
They could giggle as they worked
and did.

Laurel Speer

HUNTING SONG IN TIME OF DROUGHT

Polish my chokecherry bow
I will go hunting

There is no rain
There is nothing to hunt

String it tight
Tight as my arm strings

There is no rain
Your arms have grown weak

Sheath it in snakeskin
So I may be silent

There is no thunder
To hide your dry step

I will hunt buffalo
I will hunt bull elk

The herds are gone now
Blown like the dust

Tie on my feathers
To my fine arrows

You are mistaken
There is no game

You are mistaken
I will shoot clouds

Anne Valdez

New Mexico Solstice

they descend
on the sun-warmed

morning field

like a hungry flock
of starlings

on a cow lot

bend into the rattling rows
peck, peck, pecking

baskets full of

peppery
red wrinkles

Sheryl L. Nelms

SAND PAINTING

Clouds a lace
of wild carrot flower.
The rainbow a sand painting,
reds sifted by wind.
White Deer climbs
until she finds
the hogan of the sun god.

Mary Barbara Hess

SISTER

In restaurants, her waist-length hair
in a bun, she wore
a waitress uniform and walked
sort of pigeon-toed,
slightly stooped,
and now you try to find her
in the things that were hers—
the wild dogs and shy boyfriends.
In songs she liked
and places she had been,
remembering how in childhood, the fog
lifted from an ocean that sang
louder than the wheels of the car,
rushing past Jersey fields.
Your head in her lap,
You named constellations
shooting by above the window,
and with her hand she stroked
the wind from your brow.

Portia

THE ANNIVERSARY

Each year I go back to May 10th,
its import, like the bead
of a weld running down my spine.

I finger that day as if
it were a fine leaf
in the binding of an ancient

Roman calender. And each year
as I go back I
come forward, rocking like the sole

of a foot, heel to toe,
toe to heel: the slow dance
of a combat boot through a minefield.

Each year I do the somnabulist's
soft-shoe through a thicket
of hanging vines

to the music of ripe
light spooled around
the rest of my life.

I hop around drumthunder
twirl through bloodbeat,
stand strained and spent in skinripple
and sweat.

I whip myself with strips of bamboo
try to peel back the layer that's
purpled and cooled like the skin

of a pudding across a widening
welt of time. I'd trade
a testicle for one glimpse

of luke-warm emotion when, on that
morning of May 10th: behind
a bush, a small boy

smiled at me through
the sights of his rifle
and squeezed his slender finger

around the trigger
of a jammed weapon.
As I lifted my rifle

and stared into his eyes which were
like two wide
oceans of wonder,

I squeezed off a round
which peeled back
the top of his head

and felt nothing
but the recoil of my M-14.

Peter Spiro

THE FLY

I saw the fly that saw Emily die,
interposed its blue buzz between her own
remains of light and the light
on the other side of the late afternoon; the fly
that circled her room until it rose
through the ceiling to pad its flesh
with another coat of light,

reentered Emily's dying, cones and rods on fire,
her black-rimmed eyes struggling to meet the blaze,
hands moving slightly to the fly's rough music
until she, like the chairs, the wallpaper roses, dry-
eyed mourners became deaf and blind, only one
tidy scene to be seen inside her brain,
a window with billowing snow-curtains.
When that scene too had turned black,
the fly settled on her face, licked off salt and sweat.

Of course that was her only dying,
but the fly was used to such things, its business
to witness and interpose flesh,
to fatten its wings, like any other fly
who watches, soothes, amuses,
gives death to all, reminds us there is no light
without flesh, no matter how much we may swat
and try to kill with sticky ribbons.

Barbara F. Lefcowitz

WINE, AN ANSWERING MACHINE, AND SONG

Upstairs, over our heads, the rhythm
of a glass tapping a table. An old man
is hitting his wine on wood. He listens
to a song from old Vienna, about
an old man drinking wine to celebrate
his love of a young girl
who does not know he exists.
The old man makes many telephone calls,
but never receives answers,
only messages recorded on answering machines.
We often hear him
laughing at the absurdity of his situation.
He is the happiest man
we have ever known.

We have too much common sense ever to do
anything so extreme and futile.

We have pride, but no ecstasy,
accept the truth of the minor old masters
who painted our lives before we were born.

Sometimes,
we look at each other and want to scream
as did the man with the swirling face
standing on a slanting bridge in Munich.

In the next room,
our children are singing
the dirty songs
they learned in kindergarten.

Duane Locke

The Most Splendid Christmas Ever

The bank tellers break
smoke lunchroom coffee
laugh through the Avon Christmas Catalog
another hustled buck
announcing The Most Splendid Christmas Ever
first the tree ornaments
a tiny plastic phone printed with 1/800-FRIEND
a porcelain baby sleeping safely
in the curve of a cartoon crescent moon
then The Holy Family for \$24.99
Joseph 3 1/2 inches high
then the fragrant night light for your kids
chubby aproned bears misting
Herbal Garden Scents
then for your man that suede cowboy
The Tribute to American Firefighters
Beer Stein
then the goldtone unicorn stickpin
the perfumes named Soft Musk
Pearls and Lace or Odyssey
all smelling the same
and finally the marching mascara
and color co-ordinated eyeshadow
blush on squares

O Avon here are no layoffs
no repossessed Cadillac dreams
here are no old lovers night hunting
to bloody their women's faces again
no children these working women
didn't want to have
no daughters they can't protect
weekly fucked by fathers
no sons lost to drugged streets
so they order the festive wicker holiday basket
ready to stuff with nuts and candy
to greet those unexpected guests

Who can say these are not brave women
living like always in interstices of power
bright-eyed sleek-furred women
with magenta fingernails
flourishing in forgotten corners
thumbing laughing at believing
this small catalog of hope

Carol L. Gloor

Untitled, Dedicated to Mrs. Mannix

Yesterday,
we argued over the aged t.v. set.
The reception was clear,
Why fool with it? I demanded.
It's clear, yes dear,
but it can be even more so.
You responded calmly.
I let it go and allowed you
to perfect the screen.
As I leaned back into the worn sofa,
renouncing the habitual battle,
I thought of you and me
on a much younger night,
in some parents' house, with
the square set shouting its
megaphone of light into the shyly
suggestive darkness.
You insisted then that the vision
wasn't smooth, wasn't just so,
as you'd prefer it.
I ignored your comments and
concentrated on your intent eyes,
intent hands on the troublemaker.
I wished them intent on me.

In time, they arrived.
Then, our own first set and the bigger
and better four that followed.
Five sets, five kids.
You drove them batty with your
search for the piercing picture.
They squirmed behind you
to catch at least a glimpse of
their favorite show that you
were interrupting.

I smiled at their familiar frustration
and walked lighter knowing your
good efforts didn't stop with the tube.
Knowing those sincere blue eyes
shining on me,
those true strong hands
caressing my shoulders heavy with
the day's laundry and the years' time.

Yesterday,
we decided, kids out, that the t.v.
could wait until tomorrow, that
tomorrow, if need be, we'd take care
of the lines across the screen,
but that tonight, tonight in a silent
ink, we'd take care of other things. . .

In our room, your eyes, hands, again
focused on me. On rubbing out
gently my tired wrinkles, on making
me clear once more.
You always offered me respiteful
clarity. A pin miles away would drop
and I'd hear its song as it bounced
on its floor once, twice, at rest.
Falling asleep in each other's warmth.

Today,
I woke and found you numb.
Eyes shut, not seeing me in your sight.
Hands limp, not holding me in your touch.
And today,
today the t.v. screen is clear even
to my tear-coated eyes.
But that's,
only my opinion.

A.C. Kaiser

Clare,

in his confusion, lonely did walk
cold, afraid to lose his way (must
sleep head pointed north), ate
grass, ate tobacco, left
the first asylum, walking toward Mary

In youth he'd rested
easeful on the May grass
under moving clouds, the sun again
warming him as cloud moved,
steadily: heard all the birds,
had a home to go back to
where the people were alive and called him
by his right name.

Walked 80 miles,
didn't know Patty
when she picked him up in a wagon,
asked for Mary, heard again
the old lie

She can't be dead
these eight years, I have seen her
so healthy She is my other wife
though Patty has been kind to me

High forehead,
"almost to deformity," seemed to grow
with age Twenty three years,
Northampton General Asylum

They treat me
kindly I walk often to town,
sit on All Saint's porch,
worn stone my niche

They keep me
because they are training me
for a great prize fight I was
a poet but nothing came of it

The old tree
it hummed to me
of future things

William Gilson

This Is Rosa

Enter by the back. The front door is for guests.
This is Rosa's kitchen: linoleum
striped black and green like tartan plaid,
cabinets scuffed and locked against greedy hands dying
for ammonia to swallow, or just another cookie.
Brownies dry out on the counter.
Kitty litter spills on the rubber mat,
and if you look behind the stove, you'll find
a lonesome peanut.

This is Rosa's dining room: wax flowers,
wax fruit, porcelain figurines of saints,
a paint-by-number Pope colored from the waist down,
orange feet bleeding into the yellow Vatican floor,
and the Last Supper on a gold-rimmed china plate.

Welcome to Rosa's parlor: sofa, chairs covered
with foam-back throws, aluminum foil bows
on the ears of the TV antenna,
an 8 x 10 of Rosa as a bride,
and Rosa's pastel panties peeking out like Easter eggs
in the greys and whites of the laundry basket.

Finally, Rosa: in a faded apron, ironing
her husband's shirts, her one good ear cocked
to the too loud sound of the radio.
She smiles through a cloud of starch. I'd like to shake her,
the way I used to when we slept together in one bed, dreaming
of our dream houses and dream children and dream husbands.
Rosa, Rosa, I'd whisper. *Wake up. Can you hear?*
Your garden is growing thunder.

Rita Ciresi

Sanctuary

Beside the road
someone has left a lantern.
Small footprints circle it
and then off.

The house through the woods is full of light,
and if one wants to warm his hands
he will have to know a stranger's story,
of someone who waited here for a word,
then gave up the road to absence.

One could follow through a field of wheat,
parted where the lantern and the light
from her window meet,
could watch his own dust finally settle down
into her bright and private room.

But not he who loves a road,
however dark.

Robert S. King

This Is Rosa

Enter by the back. The front door is for guests.
This is Rosa's kitchen: linoleum
striped black and green like marbled
cabinets scrubbed and locked for
sanctuary.
Beside the road
Kerry hangs her hat a lantern-like
and if you look behind her you'll find
small forlornest of all
and then off.

The house through the woods is full of light
and if one wants to wait his things
he will have to know I know I know
of someone who will wait for a while
and then the last stage.

One could follow the road to the house
from her window seat, a narrow
couch which has over the years
lost its seat cushions and is now
in the grass and white.

But not he who loves a road
however dark
Shadows to be a shadow
and I have a dream
of our dream and dream children
Rosa, Rosa, I'd whisper. Wake up. Can you hear?
Your garden is growing harder.

Rosa Green

THE RIGHT BRAIN REVIEW

Contributor's Notes

The Right Brain Review

Hannah Alexander — Hannah is a graduate of Wiliam and Mary College. Her career includes some script writing for studios and directors in Hollywood. She was on the editorial staff of the *The Saturday Evening Post*. She has won numerous awards for her poetry which has appeared in books and anthologies. Her published books include: *Images and Sounds*, *Of Time and Distance*, *Islands*, and *Damocles at Midnight*.

Joe Banford —

Marsha Caddell — Marsha's work has recently appeared in numerous journals, such as *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Greensboro Review*, *Pembroke*, and *Kentucky Poetry Review*. Her recent work can be seen in an upcoming second collection, *Prophet on a Wing*.

Lillie D. Chaffin —

Rita Ciresi — Rita's work has been published, or is forthcoming in *Poet Lore*, *California Quarterly*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Colorado Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Worcester Review*, *New Oregon Review*, *Connecticut Writer*, and other magazines. Rita has recently completed a MFA in Fiction Writing from Penn State.

Robert Cooperman —

Jameson Currier — Jameson has been a member of the Writer's Community in New York and has participated in fiction workshops with David Leavitt and Joy Williams. He is a graduate of Emory University and has recently published stories in *The Cape Cod Compass*, and *The Crescent Review*.

William Gilson —

Winter, 1990

Carol L. Gloor — Carol is a bank lawyer and a writer whose poems have been published in many little magazines, most recently *Libido*, and *Korone*. Approximately 32 of her poems will appear as part of a trilogy, with the work of two other poets, to be published by Thorntree Press in Winnetka, Illinois, in 1990.

Mary Barbara Hess — Mary's poems have appeared most recently in *The Northern Review*, *Oxford Magazine*, and *Manhattan Poetry Review*.

A.C. Kaiser — Ann grew up in Michigan, but has been living on the East Coast for the last five years obtaining an education inside, and outside of the classroom. She is currently a first year graduate at The Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University in Washington, D.C..

Robert S. King — Robert has recently had poems published, or forthcoming in *Kenyon Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Chariton Review*, *Negative Capability*, *Poem*, *Louisville Review*, *En Passant*, etc.. Robert has also had two chapbooks published: *When Stars Fall Down As Snow*, Garland Press, 1976, and *Dream of the Electric Eel*, Wolfson Publications, 1982. He also has a full-length book entitled *Karma of a Gravedigger*.

Mindy Kronenberg — Mindy has had poems published in over 100 periodicals in the U.S. and abroad. She is the recipient of several awards, including first prize in the 1986 Chester H. Jones Foundation national poetry competition. Her work has been nominated for the General Electric Younger Writer Award, and a Pushcart Prize. She teaches writing courses on Long Island, and edits and reviews books for the Writers Alliance newsletter, *Keystrokes*. Mindy is an instructor for the Taproot Workshops Inc., a literary organization for senior citizens, and serves as an editorial assistant for the *Taproot Journal*.

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Barbara F. Lefcowitz — Barbara, who lives in Bathesda, Maryland, has published three books of poetry; her fiction, poetry, and essays have appeared in over 100 journals, including *The Chicago Review*, *New Letters*, *Other Voices*, *Prarie Schooner*, *Kayak*, *PLMA*, etc.. She has won writing fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Maryland Arts Council. For bread she teaches English at a community college and for sanity she paints and makes prints. She has recently finished a novel and a fourth book of poetry.

Duane Locke — Duane lives in the slums of Tampa, Florida with one wife, two dogs, and twelve cats. He spends time, writing, gardening, gourmet cooking, and listening to opera. "Once upon a time, I edited poetry magazines." His work has appeared in print over a thousand times, mostly poems. His latest poems appear in *American Poetry Review*, a short story in *Thema*, a critical essay in *On Louis Simpson: Depths Beyond Happiness*, edited by Hank Lazar.

Joanne M. Marinelli —

Beverly G. Merrick — Beverly holds Master's degrees in Journalism and Creative Writing, and a PhD in Mass Communications from Ohio University in Athens. She is a visiting Assistant Professor at East Carolina University in Greenville, NC, where she teaches writing and mass media law. She has been published in numerous publications including *et cetera*, *The Awakening*, *The Platte Valley Review*, *Pearls for the Casting*, and *New Mexico English Journal*.

Sheryl L. Nelms — Sheryl has had over 2,700 poems published in literary and commercial magazines. She has been published in *Kansas Quarterly*, *Webster Review*, *Buffalo Spree*, *Chunga Review*, *Art Times*, *Cedar Rock*, *Spoon River Quarterly*, etc.. Her first book of poetry *Their Combs Turn Red in the Spring*, was published by Northwoods Press, Thomaston, Maine. She has had a chapbook published by Dawn Valley Press, Westminster College, New Willimington, PA.

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Portia — Portia was awarded a 1989 Wisconsin Arts Board Grant for writing. Her chapbook of poems, *Of Water*, was published in 1987 by Valhalla Press, and her poems and stories have appeared in *Card Poetry Quarterly*, *Cream City Review*, *Poet & Critic*, and other periodicals. She has a PhD from the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee where she teaches Creative Writing.

Andrea Potos — Andrea is a native of Wisconsin, transplanted to Chicago four years ago. While in Chicago, she worked as a secretary in the creative department of a large advertising agency. She and her husband have returned to Madison. Her poems have been, and will be published in *Korone*, *Muse*, *Poetpourri*, *The Amaranth Review*, and *Verve*.

Gertrude Rubin — Gertrude is 68 years old, and graduated from the Writers Program at University of Illinois at Chicago, in 1978. She has been published in four anthologies, including *Naming the Daytime Moon* (Feminist Writers Guild). She is active in the Poets Club of Chicago and was an assistant editor of its 50th year anthology, *Light and Sound*.

Brian Skinner — Brian was a designer and builder of custom furniture until 1988 when he began juggling stock market securities, freelance furniture-making, and writing. His work has appeared or will be published in *MARK*, *Starsong*, *Mind In Motion*, *The Writers' Block*, *B-Q*, *The Blizzard Rambler*, *Tomorrow Magazine*, *Star Route Journal*, *Dream International Quarterly*, *Stellanova*, *Word & Image*, and *Clift Magazine*.

Laurel Speer — Laurel's poems have recently been published in *New Letters*, *Mississippi Valley Review*, *Centennial Review*, *Tar River Poet*, and *Poet & Critic*.

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Peter Spiro — Peter's Poetry has appeared in many magazines including *Albany Review*, *Maryland Review*, *The Panhandler*, and *Poets On:.* He was the 1988 Hunter College Academy of American Poets prize winner and had poetry included in their 7th anthology, *New Voices*. His play, *The H Train to Brooklyn* was produced at the National Theatre in Washington D.C. and later at the Ensemble Studio Theatre in NYC. His play *The Gift* was produced by Theatre for the Forgotten.

Anne Valdez — Anne was born in Maine, raised in Chicago and lives in Itasca (when her mind is not elsewhere). She has appeared in *Kaleidoscope*, *Arts Alive*, and several now-defunct publications.

Barbara Van Noord — Barbara has had poems published or accepted by about twenty small journals in the past year or so, including *Kalliope*, *Slant*, *The Minnesota Review*, and some with odd and wonderful names.