



NORTHRIDGE REVIEW

fall 1993



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CONTENTS

MILKY CONSISTENCY

Timothy Schein

6

.....

HOW IT REALLY HAPPENED

Matthew Miller

16

.....

THERE IS NO FATBURGER ON VENTURA & CANOGA

Jeannie Dolan

29

.....

ORDINARY MEN

Colleen O'Mara

30

.....

REPRESSION

Gregory Lee Kinne

35

.....

THE PRINCESS STORY

Stacy Lynn Snyder

38

.....

WINTER

Tom Tapp

42

.....

HOLLYWOOD BED

Sharon Becker

48

HIM

Chip Erikson

50

.....

CONNOR THE INVISIBLE

Rolin Jones

59

.....

DISCHARGED

Damon Lewis

60

.....

WOUNDS

Jana Myga

67

.....

SCRAPED

Amy M. Lam

68

.....

ALL STRIPPED DOWN

Sharon Becker

72

.....

LOVE IS ALL AROUND

Jim Stark

74

.....

I-5 TRIPTYCH

Rolin Jones

84

.....

SKIN DEEP

Christopher Jung

86

.....

CREDITS

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TIMOTHY SCHEIN

MILKY CONSISTENCY

THE 7-ELEVEN PARKING LOT WAS GLAZED OVER WITH A light blanket of wasted water, reflecting the garish neon lights of the little building in a small sea of second hand colors. An artist's used palette. Chester Wilder pulled his weathered 87 Honda into the center of it and parked carelessly, using two spaces. It didn't matter. It was 3:00 a.m. and no one was to be seen. Chester imagined the clerk fast asleep in the back, stretched out across a couple of milk crates, his head resting on a pillow of potato chips. Being paid to sleep.

Chester needed milk. And although 3:00 a.m. was a somewhat unusual hour to be running errands, the milk provided a lovely excuse to run out on an argument with Joyce. "Look, I'm going out," he said.

"Out where?"

"To get milk. To get milk for the kids' cereal."

"But I'm not finished talking. The kids can eat eggs."

"No, they need cereal. I need cereal. Oat Bran."

He left and he drove, maneuvering his car through the city streets with the windows down and the heater on. It had rained earlier, and the smell of rainwater on asphalt was smoky and musty. He thought about his marriage. He thought about his life.

He remembered telling people he'd never get married. Marriage was for the weak. People who couldn't be comfortable with themselves. Marriage was an anchor around your neck, all the time pulling you down beneath the water's surface. All daily energy spent trying to keep your head above. To keep the lungs filled with oxygen. With life. And just when you think you've mastered treading the water and are breathing easily *Boom*: another child. Ten more pounds of burdensome weight.



People who need people are the luckiest people He laughed aloud and turned the radio down as he pulled into the 7-Eleven parking lot, mixing the neon colors with the tread pattern of his worn Goodyears.

He walked through the door, tripping the infrared sensor. A rude alarm for the clerk dozing in back. Chester walked to the refrigerated case and stared mindlessly. *Farmer John, Hillshire Farms, Kraft, Knudsen.* His tired eyes captured and reflected back in the slowly spoiling meat. He opened the case and removed a bright red carton of Borden Vitamin D whole milk and glanced downward at his midsection hanging unflatteringly over his belt. Thick rich milk for growing bones did little for a 35 year-old rapidly approaching middle age evidenced by a flabby mid-section. He thought about his own father's enormous belly and how as a kid he'd always kept as much physical distance between he and it, not to draw attention to the fact that he, Chester Wilder, was somehow related to a man attached to such utter ugliness. *No dad, you don't have to come do the scout meeting if you don't want ... No, I don't need a ride to Jim's, but thanks anyway.* The old guy never seemed to catch on.

Chester had read somewhere that the only difference between lowfat and whole milk was calories. His kids put so much sugar on their cereal — even the Cap't Crunch — they'd never notice a change in milky consistency. He could fill the carton with urine. They'd never know the difference. They hardly looked at anything but the television while they ate. Nevertheless, knowing better, he still held the red carton of whole milk. Force of habit.

Chester made his way to the register, the cold milk pressed up against his light nylon jacket, slowly chilling his right nipple. It felt nice. Something akin to a desirable itching in his groin. He stopped by the magazine rack and gazed furtively at their glossy covers.

Vogue, Glamour, Cosmopolitan. They all boasted photographs of beautiful women Chester had seen only on the covers of magazines. Blonde women, pert breasts bulging unnaturally from their bodies, pushing the elastic limits of their clingy stretch dresses that so narrowly covered their pubic areas (which Chester assumed were shaved clean anyway for another day's swimsuit session). Different faces, different clothes, different names — all the same bodies. Bodies he'd never touched, or dreamed he'd have the opportunity to touch. Fleishy facial perfection existing entirely in his mind, projected upon the insides of his eyelids as he tried to reach orgasm with the same familiar friction of ten years of marriage.

A dull thudding sounded softly outside, quickly reaching a mind-numbing level. Chester raised his head from the magazine rack's sea of faces and looked outside. A small metallic blue Toyota pickup parked and turned off its engine. The droning bass beat of a nameless hip-hop song by a faceless band continued to shake the front windows as if they were once again liquid. Sound waves on

a warm glass sea.

Three young boys, none older than seventeen, spilled out from the cab of the truck. All were dressed essentially the same: baggy jeans cinched tightly at the waist with thick black leather belts, wildly patterned silk or rayon shirts, black Doc Martens, with thick cloth coats depicting the insignias of various professional baseball teams. Each jacket matched the respective wearer's hat, all worn at different angles on their separate heads. Individuality, Chester assumed.

He altered his course toward the register with a detour into the candy aisle, more as a means to watch than to satisfy any craving for sweets. The boys formed a loose huddle in the lot. Chester made out an occasional "Holmes" or "Homeboy" but had a hard time following their conversation through the thick glass. *Bulletproof?* he wondered.

As if attached by some invisible elastic cord that prohibited movement of more than three feet from a common center, the group made their way into the store. The common center was a taller boy in a California Angels cap with the thin beginnings of his facial hair cropped into a patchy goatee. He led the way into the store with the other's dutifully tailing, never breaching the three-foot allowance.

Peering through the rack in the candy aisle, Chester charted their movement against a backdrop of *Bubble Yum*, *Life Savers*, and *Tic Tacs*. He didn't think of himself as a nosy person, but the thought of Joyce, sitting at their dilapidated Formica kitchen table with the thin shaky legs, chain smoking Kents, hell bent on argument reentry, did little to propel him toward the checkout with any sort of urgency. He opted to survey the candy while keeping a stalling eye on the kids.

The boys circled about the store mumbling to themselves. Chester began to lose interest, giving the candy more a serious browsing. They came nearer. Their mumbling becoming gradually clearer — a swimmer coming to the surface — until Chester could hear them plainly.

"What up? How many?" a darkly complected boy in a Cleveland Indians cap asked.

"If it was up to me, I'd get thirty for myself. Fuck you guys," Angel said. The rest responded with nervous laughter. "The lady wants to dance with me first, second and last, friends."

"Then why's she got all three of us here?" the Cleveland Indian shot back. The Detroit Tiger laughed, but quickly quieted with the glare given him by Angel. He continued, ignoring the challenge as if it were nothing more than a single ant waging war on the entire grand planet Earth: "I'll just get as many as we've got money for."

"She's hot," Tiger stated reaching deep into the pockets of his baggy jeans

and dumping a handful of cash and coins into Angel's open hands.

"She totally want's it. I can tell," said the Indian doing the same.

Chester was half-tempted to quickly bridge the half an aisle distance between them and plop down his share just to be in on it. To be in on something. A camaraderie long since passed him by: his youth, his friends, his marriage, his wife, and soon his kids, whose unfailing worship that once had seemed so endlessly deep — bordering on something spiritually untarnishable — was now crumbling apart into pieces like a bag of cookies dropped on a hard linoleum floor. Impossible to reassemble. They no longer looked at him for *all* the answers. Television, school, magazines, and their friends supplied more current, less antiquated information. But here was a chance to join up once again. To become one-of-the-guys.

He never would.

So he watched, feeling mildly guilty but unable to direct his attention away. He was back in third grade. On the school bus 9 year-old Chester Wilder dropped his brand new box of 64 Crayolas with the built-in sharpener. The crayons rolled and skittered away from him beneath the seats as the bus driver accelerated and braked. Little Chester was seized with a sick panic. His mother's words filling his young head: *responsible little boys take good care of their belongings*. He slipped down under the bus seat trying to gather up the lost crayons. Moving and squirming like a man in a crawlspace, he worked his way forward until he was under the seat directly in front. Reaching for another lost crayon he shifted from his stomach to his back, and found himself looking up the yellow flowered dress of Lisa Nightingale. She held a large Mead folder across her lap blocking her view of Chester.

He forgot all about the box of 64 Crayolas with the built-in sharpener. All he could do was stare at the bright white cotton underpants that covered her so smoothly, so unlike his own that covered a bumpy, bulgy exterior. As long as he remained still he could gaze happily at something otherwise forbidden. Something of beauty because it was so completely foreign. He was part of a secret worship. An uninvited yet welcome member of the club. He stared quietly until he felt the bus round the familiar curve just before his stop. Only out of necessity did he grudgingly pull himself away.

"What kind," the Indian asked. Chester jerked his eyes away, afraid he'd been staring. He picked up a Payday candy bar. *Serving size one*, it read, *390 calories*.

"Cheap kind. Fuck lubrication. When she sees me, that's all she'll need," Angel said. Tiger and the Indian laughed as they all made their way toward the counter.

Chester wondered if the girl they spoke of was in the truck out front. He

wanted a visual picture to compare with his assumptions. The willing woman. He slowly rose to the tips of his toes, trying to sneak a peek over the candy rack to the truck in the parking lot. Darkly tinted windows. Nothing. He dropped back down flat onto the soles of his worn Nikes, wishing he's seen her.

Angel made the purchase. As the others followed him out to the parking lot he tossed them each a box. "Live it up friends," was the last thing Chester heard him say before they left, tripping the sensor. It made the same annoying buzz whether one was coming or going.

Chester walked to the register and set the milk on the counter. The clerk was rubbing sleep from his eyes. Outside, Chester saw Tiger open the door of the truck. A small, petite young girl stepped out, distinguishable mostly for her entire lack of any distinguishing characteristics. Young, short, and plump, with a forgettable face framed by brown shoulder length hair that couldn't be called either curly nor straight. *Wavy* he supposed. Definitely not the flashy sex kitten he had secretly thought. Not a *Cosmo* girl. Regardless, Chester felt his nipple tingle again, although the milk was no longer against it.

Tiger and the Indian hopped back into the truck, followed by the girl. The truck roared to life. The thundering bass beat shook the store's front glass once again as it pulled away.

Chester was gripped by an urge. An urge to see more. Even participate maybe. Irrational as it was, he reached into his jacket pocket and fumbled for his car keys. "Look," he said to the clerk, "I gotta go ... I forgot my wallet. I'll just run home. Be right back."

The clerk frowned.

Outside, the wind was picking up strength. Strong steady gusts whipping the surrounding palm tree fronds into a slow brushing frenzy. The intensity of the parking lot's reflected colors becoming somewhat muted as the water was whisked away. Chester started his car just as the truck's taillights were beginning to fade from sight. He darted from the parking lot, wishing he'd opted for fuel injection back in 87.

He hung a good quarter mile back. It wasn't difficult to keep the truck in sight. He thought about high school. His friend George who could easily identify the make of any automobile simply from the nighttime glowing shape of their taillights. The endless hours spent doing just that. And now, as an occasional car swung between the Honda and the truck, Chester smiled softly to himself, quietly thanking George Winston for the little bit of know-how that had inadvertently been passed along.

Trying to keep them in sight, he didn't read the street signs. Rather, he concentrated on mirroring their motions: Right *right* — Left *left*. He recognized the first couple streets, but soon was in an unfamiliar neighborhood, similar

yet somehow darker than his own. Another tiny enclave of analogous houses, with only minor cosmetic variations. More endless tract homes. Five styles. Scattershot order. A contractor's idea of individuality.

The truck's brake-lights flared bright red. Chester stopped the Honda two blocks back and quickly killed his lights and engine. He slumped in the seat. Eyes peering out just above the dashboard. He was pretty sure he hadn't been seen. The hours logged on *The Rockford Files* finally good for something.

The truck's doors opened and all inside poured out onto the street: Tiger, Angel, the Indian, and the girl. The boys huddled about her in a tight circle obscuring Chester's view, but nonetheless he could see. He saw her white skin and long lustrous black hair. Her breasts riding high. Her stomach and thighs smooth and yet unmarked by time's pocked revenge. The surprised expressions of delight that flickered across her face with each new sensual wonder. Each new experience provoking a different reaction. Never familiar.

His arms and legs tingled as if filled with ginger ale.

The huddle made its way into the house. Lights came on.

Chester left the Honda and closed the door quietly, grateful for the increasing wind that muffled the otherwise dead quiet of the late hour. He moved toward the house adopting a mock confidence. A local homeowner on late night community patrol.

Just above an unkept hedge circling the house, a large bay window allowed visual access to a sparsely furnished living room. Chester darted toward the window and hid among the bushes below, again confident he hadn't been seen. A high-backed couch blocked the bottom six inches of the window, leaving a small area on either side between the window and the wall. Chester slid his head into the gap and surveyed the room.

They all bounded in, arms filled with pillows and blankets. Angel and Tiger moved the furniture to the far walls of the room, clearing an open area in the center. The carpet beneath each piece, although matted, looked fresh and new. The Indian began spreading blankets on the floor, covering it with a patchwork of blues, whites, and reds.

The girl entered the room. She wore a short denim shirt, white stockings, and a low-cut sheer black bustier. Chester decided that she wasn't more than five years older than his own daughter. But those were crucial years. His daughter was really no different from her 8 year-old younger brother. Both sexless sticks — ten and eight — more concerned with afternoon television than anything else. At least not yet.

The girl walked toward Angel and kissed him deeply. Her arms around his neck; his around her waist. After a moment, they pulled apart and Tiger stepped in, then the Indian, and finally back to Angel. A sexual square dance. He turned her around, her back against his chest, and ran his hands over her body. Tiger

and the Indian began doing the same. The girl rolled her head back against Angel's shoulder and smiled.

They began to undress her.

Chester watched from his dark alcove, not feeling the sharp branches prick his hands, drawing tiny drops of blood. He brought his fingers to his mouth and began chewing on the nails. Something he hadn't done since he was a teenager. A teenager with his first girlfriend: Renee Bacon. Sixteen; her white canopied bed. Her parents gone to Myrtle Beach for the weekend. Renee made dinner. Pork chops and candlelight. A bath together, bed, sex for the first time. The moment he entered her he wished it were over. It was far too intimate. He had no business being there, and she, no business asking him to be. Afterward, he felt ashamed. He held her face to his chest, not wanting to make eye contact. Not wanting to ask questions or make promises. It was always the same with her. It was always the same.

They were all in their underwear now. The girl was plump. Soft and round. Pink panties one size too small dug into her thighs and bottom. The boys — thin lanky and frail-looking without their thick coats — all had their hands upon her. Three masseuses; one client. She writhed under their hands, using her body to guide their touch. Angel unclasped her bra and deftly removed her panties as if he'd performed the action a hundred times before.

The Indian was the first to remove his underwear. He made a move toward the girl now lying on her back. Angel grabbed him by the shoulder and roughly pushed him away. The Indian made a quick angry lunge toward Angel, but the action was quelled simply by his icy gaze. Angel then finished undressing.

He was upon her. He worked inside her as the others watched, and occasionally touched, her or themselves. Chester felt as though he were watching a play. Community theater. The actors cognizant of their audience, yet true to their profession the fourth wall stood solid.

Angel finished and was followed by Tiger. Tiger finished and was followed by the Indian. And by that time Angel was ready again. A bottomless well of youthful energy. Assembly-line sex. With each new partner came a new position with no awkward shifting of bodies. A finely tuned machine. The girl smiled. Hitting her marks. Again and again.

Chester watched two complete cycles before moving away from the window. He walked back to the Honda as the sun was rising slowly over the horizon, evaporating the night chill. There was no wind now. He was warm in his light nylon jacket. He rolled up the windows, turned off the heat, and drove away.

The 7-Eleven was still deserted when he pulled into the parking lot. The

outdoor neon lights were off now. The parking lot was dry. Nothing to reflect. Nothing to reflect upon. He chose his milk and headed home.

With the coming of new daylight, the oncoming drivers began turning off their headlights. Chester watched them wink out two by two. He thought about Joyce. The first time they'd had sex. How he hoped it would be different. It wasn't. Pregnancy. Catholicism. Lack of choices.

The kitchen light was on. Joyce was sitting at the table. An ashtray full of cigarette butts at arm's length. She looked up at him. "Did you get the milk?" she asked calmly.

"Yeah," he said, holding up the light blue carton.

She looked at him quizzically. "Low fat?"

"Yeah, low-fat."

He set the milk down and walked toward her. She stood. He looked into her pale blue eyes for several seconds, kissed her lightly, and put his hands around her waist, pulling her close. She hesitated briefly, then slipped her arms around his neck. He held her tightly.

MATTHEW MILLER

How It Really Happened

IT WASN'T ANY FUN.

Fred thought about it as he studied the beetle that sat on the tree before him. It wasn't much fun, but he couldn't just stop now, not when he was so close. After so many years — he had lost count after they moved construction to the river — he and his family had reached the second phase of their plan, the critical phase, and after they completed it, it would be all downhill. An easy ride that Fred felt he deserved, after the hardships of the last few years.

Some years back, Fred had outlined his plan to his perplexed family thusly: Phase I — find workers to help build a really big ship. Phase II — build a really big ship. Phase III — bring aboard a male and female of every sort of creature on Earth. Phase IV — wait for the storm.

It took forever for Fred to explain to his family that they had no choice in the matter — it had come to him in a miraculous vision. You didn't go around questioning miraculous visions, you just *obeyed* them. Still, Marla, his wife, wondered if what they were doing was right.

Fred looked at the beetle on the tree trunk in front of him. As soon as he was sure that it was the mate of the one already in his pocket, he moved quickly and grabbed it. With great care he deposited it into his other pocket and then started back toward the ship.

He made his way out of the trees, over the hills, and finally to the quiet river where the gigantic boat was anchored, waiting to sail Fred and his family away to safety. Marla was waiting for him as he made his way across the plank that connected the ship to the land.

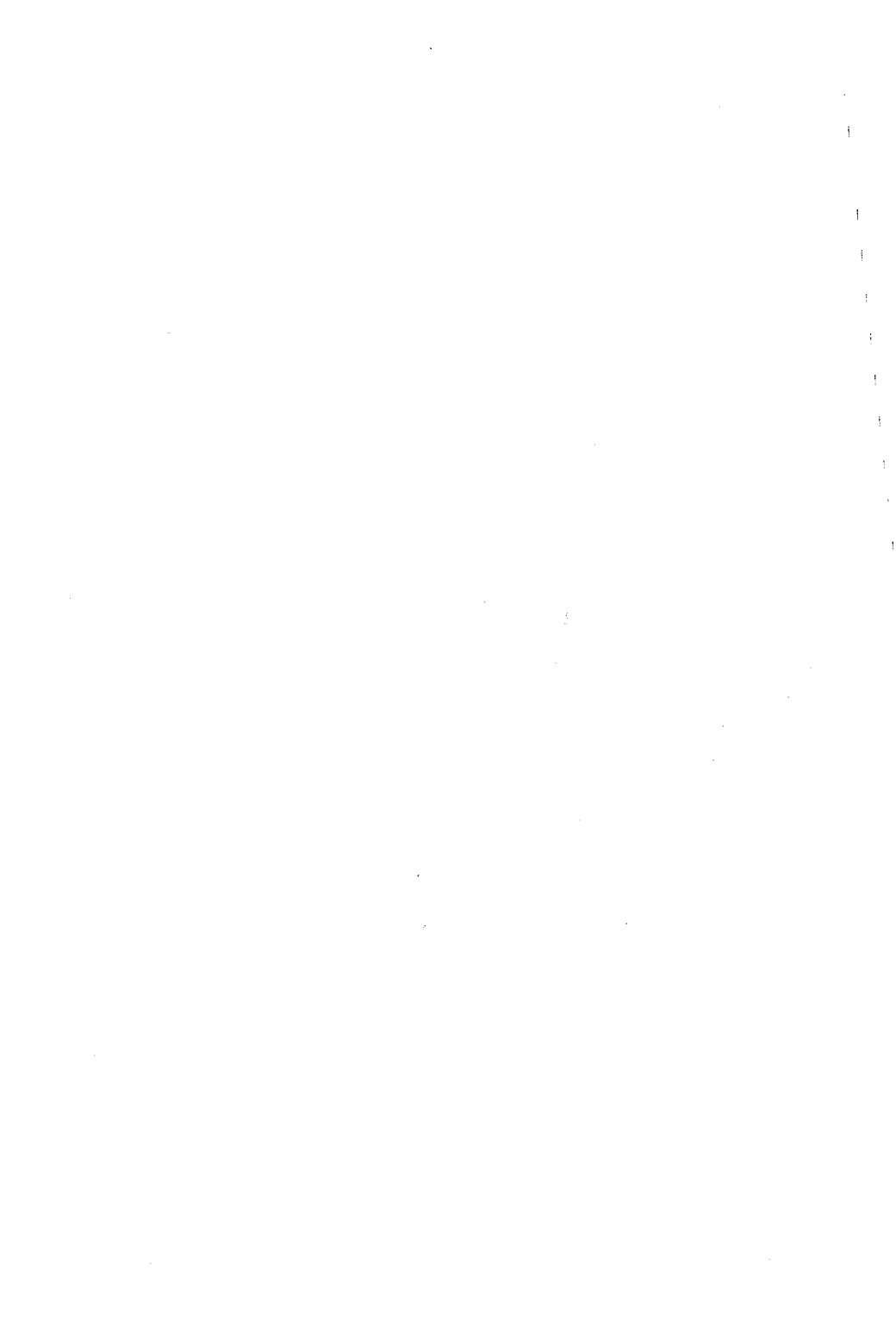
"I'm assuming you found them," Marla said, helping him on board.

"Thought you'd be gone by now," he said.

"I was on my way out, but I found something I think you should take a look



HOW IT REALLY HAPPENED! *WEEKLY*



at.”

“Trouble?”

“Something you should take a look at.”

“Where are the kids?”

“Fred Jr. and Rob are in town, and Jimbo’s probably on his way back.” Fred’s son Jim hadn’t gone by his real name since elementary school, where his friends affectionately referred to him as “Jimbo.” The name stuck.

“Yes, I found them,” he said.

Fred made his way through a low hallway and into a large cabin filled with some uprooted trees and scattered weeds that he had found near the river. He pulled the two beetles from his pockets and placed them on a tree that was propped against the bulkhead. He then returned topside to the deck.

“Let’s have a look,” he said, walking toward Marla.

She led him down three different ladders into the bowels of the ship. In a storage room, she stopped and pointed toward the far end.

“Take a gander at the bulkhead,” she said.

He walked over to inspect it. Running from the deck to the overhead was a small line of tiny white insects. Fred stepped back and arched his brow.

“Termites,” he said, shaking his head.

Marla stood quietly.

“I didn’t know the damn things multiplied so fast,” he continued. “I mean, granted, they were some of the first things that I brought on board, but —”

“Are you kidding me?” Marla interrupted. “You brought them first? That was weeks ago! How far do you think they’ve —”

“I had to, alright? Look, I know it wasn’t the most brilliant idea, but the damn termites have to be saved with everything else! We’ll worry about them later, when we have time!”

“But I don’t —”

“Yes, time! Right now, we need to keep plugging away. We’re quite out of time.”

Time was the one segment of the plan that worried Fred most. He didn’t think twice about other matters, like how difficult it would be to herd two fifty-foot giraffes aboard the ship. No, he was most concerned with time. So much had been wasted already.

He had inspected the first blueprint for his grand ship and rejected it. Too small. He rejected the second and third ones too. The fourth one had pleased him, and he was all set to begin construction out in the desert with the group of 100 men hired from the city, when his friend Thomas approached him.

“You’re going to build *here*?” Thomas asked him.

Fred looked at the barren desert around him.

“Why not?” Fred replied.

“You’re in the middle of the bloody desert!”

“Exactly!” Fred exclaimed, good naturedly. “It’s perfect. I won’t have to worry about any stupid townsfolk taunting me. It’s perfectly isolated. We can work without distractions.”

“Yeah, but where are you gonna get all your dumb animals? You gonna lead them all out here in the heat? What’s it gonna be like leading a bloody lion through the desert and into your boat?”

“Well, I hadn’t ...” Fred trailed off, his brow wrinkling up.

“And how are you gonna know if the thing even floats, right? If there’s no water to test it in, how are you gonna know you built it right?”

Fred frowned.

“I can see it now!” Thomas laughed, slapping his knees. “The storms come, and you haven’t even sealed the wood properly! The great ship sinks!”

After that, Fred and his men spent weeks moving the supplies from the desert back to Fred’s home near the very calm Kimson River, closer to town. There, over many years, they built the enormous ship into the water, to make sure that it would float. The change in locations seemed to take forever, and Fred knew that it wouldn’t be much longer before the rain began to fall.

On the deck he consulted his checklist.

“Damn! There’re so many animals that we have to capture. We’ve really got to hustle a bit more.”

“Remember,” Marla jumped in, “that one guy that worked for you, was it Alvin? He said a few weeks ago that he’d be able to get those hippos up here in less than three weeks. He’s due any day now.”

Jimbo, a muscular young man, appeared with a large cage strapped to his back. Two black birds were crammed inside.

“Hiya’ pop!” he cried. “Look! I found two ravens, a male and a female.”

Fred and Marla admired the birds for a moment with their son.

“They’re stunning,” Fred said. “Go ahead and take them to the Bird Room. We’ve got a lot of work to do.”

“Oh, I saw Fred Jr. and Rob in town this morning,” Jimbo said, reaching into his pocket. “They wanted me to give you this note.”

“Thanks,” Fred said as Jimbo disappeared down a ladder. Fred liked how Jimbo’s enthusiasm always gushed forth from him, unlike his brothers, Fred Jr. and Rob. Fred Jr. and Rob were younger, and always seemed more preoccupied with the girls from the city than their duties to the family.

After showing the note into his pocket, Fred looked at Marla.

“Look,” he began, “we’ve got to go after the so called *Great Cats* now, while the opportunity is here.”

Marla rolled her eyes and sighed.

“I know what you’re thinking, but we’ve no choice, really. Wally and Will’s

Wonderful Traveling Zoo is in town, and I think we may be able to get a couple from them before they split. It'll be a lot easier than traveling to bumfuck Egypt looking for the damn things."

"Nuts," Marla said under her breath.

"What can I say? He said in the vision that *everything* must survive."

"Then the least you could do is tell us how much longer we have!"

"Look, I don't know, alright?" Fred said angrily. "He said that it's got to be done as quickly as possible, because he's going to flood the whole friggin' land. The whole Earth, as I understand it."

"It's taken years just to construct this crazy ship! The flood hasn't come soon enough to keep everyone in the city from guffawing at us! The men you paid to build this monstrosity laughed as they hammered away! Our own friends," she cried, grabbing him by the shoulders. "Our own friends think we've flipped our lids! They stood over there laughing!"

Fred remembered the laughing. He had supervised the building at all times, and for the first year and a half or so, building the ship had been like bringing the circus to town. People from the city would leave work and bring their families out and have a picnic in front of the building site. They laughed and jeered at Fred and his workers as they sawed and hammered away. Fred still vividly remembered the time a young man heckled his wife near the river as he hid behind a stack of wooden beams, listening.

"Still helping your crazy old man build his mighty ship?" the young man called out.

Marla ignored him as she picked up the leftovers of the lunch she had fixed for a group of the hired workers.

"Have you found two monkeys for you ship yet, woman? Have they taken a liking to your husband?"

A large group of spectators behind the young man burst into laughter.

"There won't be any more goddamned laughing after we're riding the waves!" Fred cried, returning to the present. "Soon they won't mock us! Soon they'll be under ten miles of water, and then who'll be doing the mocking?"

Fuming, he walked to the side of the ship, and gazed upon the river. There was nobody around now. After that initial year and a half of picnics and jeering, the novelty had worn off, and the people, for the most part, stopped coming out.

A frantic beating of wings startled Fred and Marla, and they turned to see two small brown birds flying out of the stairwell Jimbo had descended minutes before. Shortly, he emerged cursing.

"I thought you went to dump the ravens into the Bird Room," Fred said.

"I did," Jimbo hissed. "But when I opened the door to get them in, two other birds escaped! Fuck!"

"It looked like a woodpecker and a jay," Fred said, annoyed. "I saw them. It's absolutely imperative that we recapture them. Give me this," he said, yanking the strap-on bird cage off Jimbo's back. "I'll go get them. It's up to you now to go and bring a tiger and a lion here, to the Great Cats Room."

"Me?" Jimbo said, startled. "I think *you* should help me with something this dangerous, pop. At least get Fred Jr., or Rob to help."

"Sorry kiddo. *I've* got to go and recapture the damned birds that are once again flying around thanks to your carelessness."

Fred started pushing Jimbo in the direction of the plank.

"Wally and Will's Wonderful Traveling Zoo is getting ready to wrap up its stay in the city," Fred said. "All you have to do it tell them what you need. They're always hocking their goods on somebody."

"What if money —"

"I just gave you your allowance!" Fred yelled. "If they want money, give 'em that. After you've got the cats, you've got to get them back *here*. Provoke them somehow."

"This is fucking crazy!" Jimbo cried.

"Are you actually questioning the word of our *maker*? Now get out of here! Go and get me a lion and a tiger!"

Glaring at his father, Jimbo proceeded slowly down the plank, and disappeared over the hills.

"You're absolutely obsessed," Marla said. Fred's back faced her. "You've never treated any of the boys like this." She hesitated, thinking, then continued: "It still seems like all of this started after we first met old Elizabeth in the city. Remember, those things she gave us? Those crazy-ass mushrooms that made the sky melt into —"

"I didn't eat any mushrooms, alright?" Fred seethed. He faced Marla. "I keep telling you that, and you never believe me. Why can't my own damn wife trust me? The vision *was* real. I was *wide* awake, and He told me that He was seriously pissed, and that it was up to me, and only me mind you, to build the ship before He flooded *everything*."

Quickly, he strapped the cage onto his back.

"I'm outta' here," he said.

On his way over the hills and toward the trees, Fred remembered the vision.

It was a cool morning, overcast, and Fred was enjoying it. He had been feeling very good, very happy, since he left Elizabeth's house, and now he was walking peacefully out of the city and back home to see his family. He looked up at the clouds above him, and imagined how grand it must be in Heaven.

The light shifted then, very subtly at first, but then noticeably, and began exploding out of the clouds in thick beams of orange and red. Fred stopped, not

so much out of fear as decorum. He felt an immensely strong presence.

Then, he heard a voice.

It was very faint at first. It wasn't loud or frightening, but calm and smooth. It was growing louder.

"Fred."

Looking around and seeing nobody at all, Fred looked back toward the heavens.

"G ... G ... God?" he stuttered.

Brilliant red light continued to pour out of the clouds and all over Fred.

"Fred ... you must listen to me. I have determined to make an end of all flesh. For the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth."

Geez Fred thought. *Sounds like trouble.*

"But —"

"Do it!" the voice came back. "Don't interrupt! Listen: make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it —"

"When you say *ark*, do you mean, like a boat?"

"Yes, a big ship, if you would. You've got to make sure it has *at least* three decks, for behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die."

There was silence for a moment as Fred contemplated this.

"Kind of severe, don't ya' think?" he asked.

"Don't worry. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, erm ... the *ship*, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you."

"Groovy."

"Now here's the important part Fred, so listen closely: of every living thing of all flesh, notice the word *all*, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female."

"So," Fred said, perfectly at ease, "a guy and a gal of each kind of critter, so they can eventually have s — ah ... *reproduce* again."

"Exactly!" the voice said, pleased. "Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping things of the ground according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you, to keep them alive."

"Um ..." Fred said, thinking again. "How soon?"

"Pretty quick here," the voice returned. "I've had it with you losers."

"But of *every living thing*. I mean, that'll take some time, especially to build the ship. How can I do it *pretty quick*?"

"How would I know? Hire some workers or something! Why are you ask-

ing me these dumb questions Fred?” the voice said, fading. “That’s how it is, brother. You’d better get started ...”

And the voice faded away. Fred stood for a long time, he was unsure how long, gazing into the clouds. The beams of light eventually faded, and Fred continued home as the sun set.

Wide awake Fred thought, as he walked into the trees. *No doubt about it, I was wide awake.*

He had been in the trees for a little over an hour when he spotted the woodpecker, or at least a similar one, in a tall tree. Low hanging branches enabled him to begin to climb, but it was difficult going. Smaller branches kept getting caught in the bars of the bird cage as he pushed upward, and even smaller ones poked and stabbed him in his stomach and legs. After fifteen minutes of painful climbing, he stopped and looked up. The bird was still sitting on its branch, seemingly unconcerned.

He carefully worked the cage off his back, and held it in his right arm. Using his legs, he pushed himself toward the bird, with the cage door hanging open.

“Hello pretty,” he smiled.

The bird turned its head to examine him with one eye.

“How about flying into my cage here?” A branch stuck him in the side, but he ignored it, and the pain. “I would really like to have you.”

As he moved closer, the bird became more and more still. Then it moved, hopping once away from him. Undaunted, Fred continued with his recapture attempt.

“Come, my love. If you would just hop in here, I could save your entire population and —”

The branch in his side snapped loudly and the bird was off like a shot, alighting on another tree twenty yards away. Startled, Fred lost his grip on the cage, which dropped, bouncing off numerous branches until finally landing in the dirt below. The sweet odor of fresh sap filled his nostrils.

“Damn damn fuck all!” he yelled. “Aaarrrrghhh!” he added.

Making his way back down the tree, he thought *forget that sonuva bitch bird. Don't need it. So what if I forget one kind of woodpecker? Nobody will even notice, especially if they're all drowning anyway.*

On solid ground again, he picked up the bird cage and stormed off the way he came. High above him the woodpecker watched and mocked, much like Fred’s friends.

In an attempt to calm himself down, Fred pulled out the letter that Jimbo had given to him, and opened it up to read. Written in Rob’s handwriting, it read:

Daddy-O,

Sorry we haven't been home in a while, but Fred Jr. and I have found some excellent babes here in town, and we plan to stay with them for a while. In fact, Fred thinks he may have gotten his babe, Jessica, pregnant. Fred Jr. Jr.! Awesome! If you need to see us, you'll have to come into town.

Excelsior!

Rob

"*WHAT!*" Fred roared. He walked toward the city.

Once in town, Fred did a double take walking by the outdoor market, realizing that both of his sons were there buying food.

"What," Fred hissed, "do you bloody well think you're doing?"

Both of his sons spun around, startled.

"Dad!" Rob said.

"What is the meaning of this!" Fred cried, waving the letter in front of Rob's face. "I want the two of you to drop the food and march home NOW!"

"Sorry, dude," Fred Jr. said. "We're hanging with Jessica and Melinda."

"Have you lost your minds?" Fred's yelling was so loud it caught the attention of dozens of people around him. He was so angry he was having a hard time speaking. "We've got to shill the fip! I mean, the ship, fill it! What do you two think you're doing here?"

"Hey," a voice came from the crowd. "It's crazy old Doomsday Fred!" Laughter broke out amongst the spectators as they realized who it was.

"Hear that dad?" Rob asked. "People think like, we're insane or something, because of your ship. Fred Jr. and I are through with that. Our social lives were nil cause all the chicks thought we were stupid, but now we found a couple of nice ones, and we've decided to stay with them."

Astonished at what Rob was saying, Fred stood silently with his mouth hanging open.

"I mean, think about it," Rob said smiling, as he and Fred Jr. walked away with three baskets of food. "Wouldn't you rather be with some babes than slaving over a ship?"

Fred watched as they disappeared into the crowd.

"They're insane," he said to nobody. "I can't believe ..." Shaking his head, dumbfounded, Fred started for the ship. "They're mad."

The sun was setting when Fred got back, and the ship was silent. Not seeing Marla, he decided to calm his nerves by going to see the squirrels in the Small Rodents Room.

The window in the Small Rodents Room's door was a square hole with wooden bars. Fred peered through, and the smell of fresh feces made him gri-

mace. *To be expected* he thought.

"Hello boys," he said. Small footsteps emanated from the Room. Fred's eyes adjusted to the dark after a minute, and not far from the door he spotted a squirrel on its back, very dead. A rat stood nearby.

"Get away there!" Fred yelled, unlocking the door. Opening it, he ran in and kneeled in front of the dead squirrel, carelessly leaving the door cracked. Dozens of tiny footsteps made for the door, and Fred turned to see a group of baby rats run out into the hall. The same rats, he figured, that ate the food he had left for the squirrels.

He left the room and shut the door, but a horde of rats were gone, exploring the ship. *They multiply so quickly* he thought. *Gotta' hurry up and get out of here. Gotta' be ready for the flood.*

A loud crash reverberated throughout the ship, and Fred ran through the halls trying to find what caused it. Because of the enormity of the ship, it took him a while before, above the lowermost cabins, he found Marla cursing at the top of her lungs. Below her, an enormous hippopotamus sat helplessly wedged between two planks which had previously connected into a ramp leading downward into the Great Big Animals Room. Its mate was already at the room's entrance.

"The rampway," Fred whimpered.

"Your friend Alvin finally showed with the hippos," Marla scowled. "The first one had already gone down, and this one was on its way, when the whole thing just gave out! I got them this far, *this far*, and your rampway gives out! The damn thing's stuck, do you see? It's not getting out!"

The beasts legs kicked away desperately for a foothold, but its effort was in vain. Fred squatted near where a portion of the wood had given away, and spotted a line of tiny white insects.

"Ah fuck it! The termites are tearing the whole ship apart!"

Fred's own raving was interrupted by Marla's screaming.

"A rat!" she cried. "A rat just brushed by my foot!"

"I know," Fred said. It was too much for him. "They're multiplying out of control. A couple escaped from the Small Rodents Room. I'll capture them."

"You're a moron, you know that? This ship is huge, but it's nowhere near big enough. *Three* main decks? I was just thinking: look at that hippo."

The two watched the trapped hippo.

"There's a ton of animals as big as the hippo that are eventually going to be crammed into that stupid Largest Animals Room," Marla said. "Do you honestly think it's going to hold all of them? For God's sake, it only took one hippo, *one fucking hippo*, to ruin the ramp. What's going to happen when we bring a rhinoceros, or a giraffe in here? Not only that, but all of the stupid trees and bushes you put down there as *food* for the animals are dying anyway! You

didn't plant them in anything! Oh yeah, come with me to the Insect Room."

Fred and Marla walked the length of the ship back to the Insect Room, where Fred had been at the beginning of the day.

"Look," Marla said. "You dug up all of these trees and bushes and placed them here for the bugs to live in, but once again you didn't plant them in anything. Now they're dying. You keep saying you'll get some dirt to plant them in, but you never do. We work every hour to bring all of the animals to the ship, but there are still hundreds to go. In the meantime, everything else is dying."

He was about to tell her she was right, and he was about to tell her about the squirrel, but he heard the loud buzzing of a fly dart by his head in the direction of the hallway, in the direction of freedom.

"Shit, we've got to get out of here," Fred said, grabbing Marla. "We can't let that damn fly out."

In the hallway he locked the door.

"This is crazy!" Marla screamed. "Look at us! Nearly killing ourselves to shut a door so we don't lose a fucking *fly*? I *hate* flies! Where's your flood?"

She ran, and he didn't go after her.

He stood against the wall for a few minutes. He knew that what she said was true. Everything was dying, and it would be a task to keep it all alive, especially during the voyage. And the size of the ship — she was right again. By themselves, the hippopotamuses looked so big they seemed to fill half the lower level. He wondered if there would be any room left to breath after the ship was filled up with animals.

After reflecting and coming up with no answers, he made his way topside, and lay down to sleep in the peaceful evening air.

In the morning Fred got up and walked to his and Marla's cabin for some fresh clothes. He got as far as the entrance to the cabin when he realized that everything — closet, chest of drawers, and bed — had been ransacked. Marla stood at the far end of the cabin, holding a familiar box of fungi.

"Under the bed," she said calmly. "You hid them under the bed. I knew you had these damn things. I'll bet there is no flood. I'll bet you ate these damn things right before you had your *vision*."

Fred looked at her and didn't know what to say.

"Tell me, you son of a bitch," Marla said.

She's right. She's —

Loud, terrified screams drifted across the hills and into the cabin. Fred and Marla ran out on deck and gasped at the sight of Jimbo sprinting toward the ship. Two tigers were close behind him as he closed in on the plank.

"Motheerrraagghhh!! Heellllpaaarrghh!!"

Jimbo was halfway up the plank leading to the ship when one of the tigers

caught up and jumped. It slammed into his back and bit down on his right calf, but its momentum carried the two of them forward and then down, where they landed harshly on the wood. Still screaming, Jimbo kicked at the tiger's mouth, and inadvertently worked his way to the edge of the plank. The angry tiger closed in, and Jimbo fell off the plank and into the river below.

The other tiger spotted the husband and wife watching this gruesome spectacle from the ship, and ran for them. Fred realized this and shoved Marla.

"Split up!" he yelled.

He ran across the deck, not even seeing which way Marla went. At the far stairwell, he looked back to see that the confused tiger had decided on him. It was moving quickly.

Stumbling down the stairs, Fred tried to form thoughts in his chaotic mind: *Coming for me. Got to save myself. Got to find a way to save myself.*

The Moderately Sized Animals Room flashed in his mind. He was near it. He tripped down two more stairwells, bashing his shin in one. Above him, having some difficulty, the tiger followed. Running hard, Fred covered a long hallway that ended in a single door. The sign above it read, Moderately Sized Animals Room. At the far end of the hall, the tiger arrived. Fred fumbled for the key ring in his pocket, and shoved the proper key into the door.

"Here!" he screamed, flinging the door open. "Here's your fucking food!"

A large Airedale came bounding out, scraping its nails on the wooden floor as it struggled to stop. As the tiger moved toward it, a frightened deer made a dash for the stairwell, completely confused. Jumping past the tiger, the deer ran ahead and turned into another hallway. The tiger ran after it.

Fred gasped and tried to catch his breath, and heard a faint crashing sound, like dozens of wooden boards simultaneously splintering. The ship shifted. It was as if a giant magnet in the sky pulled the bow upward. Fred ran for the Great Big Animals Room.

Marla was already there, on the lowest level, grabbing for pieces of floating, broken wood. The lowest level was filling up with water at an amazing rate. The two hippopotamuses were gone, and he knew what happened.

Marla finally saw him.

"They're gone!" she yelled over the rushing water. "The whole damned floor gave away! The termites ate it up! We've gotta' plug this thing before we all drown! Help me Fred, you fool!"

Fred heard her, but didn't move. The ship shifted again. Under the great weight of the wood and the pressure of the water, the ship groaned and began its descent. As the water rose above his ankles, Fred thought about how the flood had finally arrived.

JEANNIE DOLAN

There is no Fatburger on Canoga & Ventura

So it's mundane night
and you're waiting
waiting for something
But you can't recall what
and soon you realize
you're at a bus stop
So you must be waiting
for a bus
You sit out there
On Ventura and Canoga by the Fatburger
and it's starting to rain.
It's raining hard
and you reach
for your umbrella but
you suddenly come to
realize that you
haven't got any arms
and in fact you further
find you have no legs
So all there is to do
is sit and wait
in the rain for a bus
But you remember this is L.A.
where the bus never comes
So you shrink further
into yourself to take
the chill off and
pretend you're alive

COLLEEN O'MARA

Ordinary Men

MY BOYFRIEND AND I WERE ON A TRAIN LAST NIGHT, SITTING and watching the sad-faced commuters and the streaking tunnel lights as they passed by. There was a man who stood to the side of us, in the doorway. He appeared to be, at first glance, an ordinary man. But like most things in life, on further inspection, he was far from that. He wore a tan coat made of soft mohair and his tie was neatly in place. He carried, under his arm, a stack of newspapers. Not an odd sight on a commuter train heading from Oakland to San Francisco but then I saw his shoes. One, a running sneaker — the other a black oxford, scuffed and worn. His coat was tattered and stained and his eye was cut just at the temple. The left side of his face was bruised and I realized that the orange cone standing alongside him was his. He kept it by him as we exited the train onto the platform. There he began talking — to us.

“What is this shit? The whole world’s fucked up!” he said in a deep raspy voice. The voice of an old bum, or a weathered grandfather.

We smiled together kindly with uncomfortable grins — the kind that never cause your lips to part. He saw us and took us at our invitation.

“I want you to do something for me,” he said approaching us like a used car salesman. Speaking to my boyfriend, he said, “I want you to call Dansalla, Tanzania at 3 a.m. I know you will. Call there through the British Consulate.”

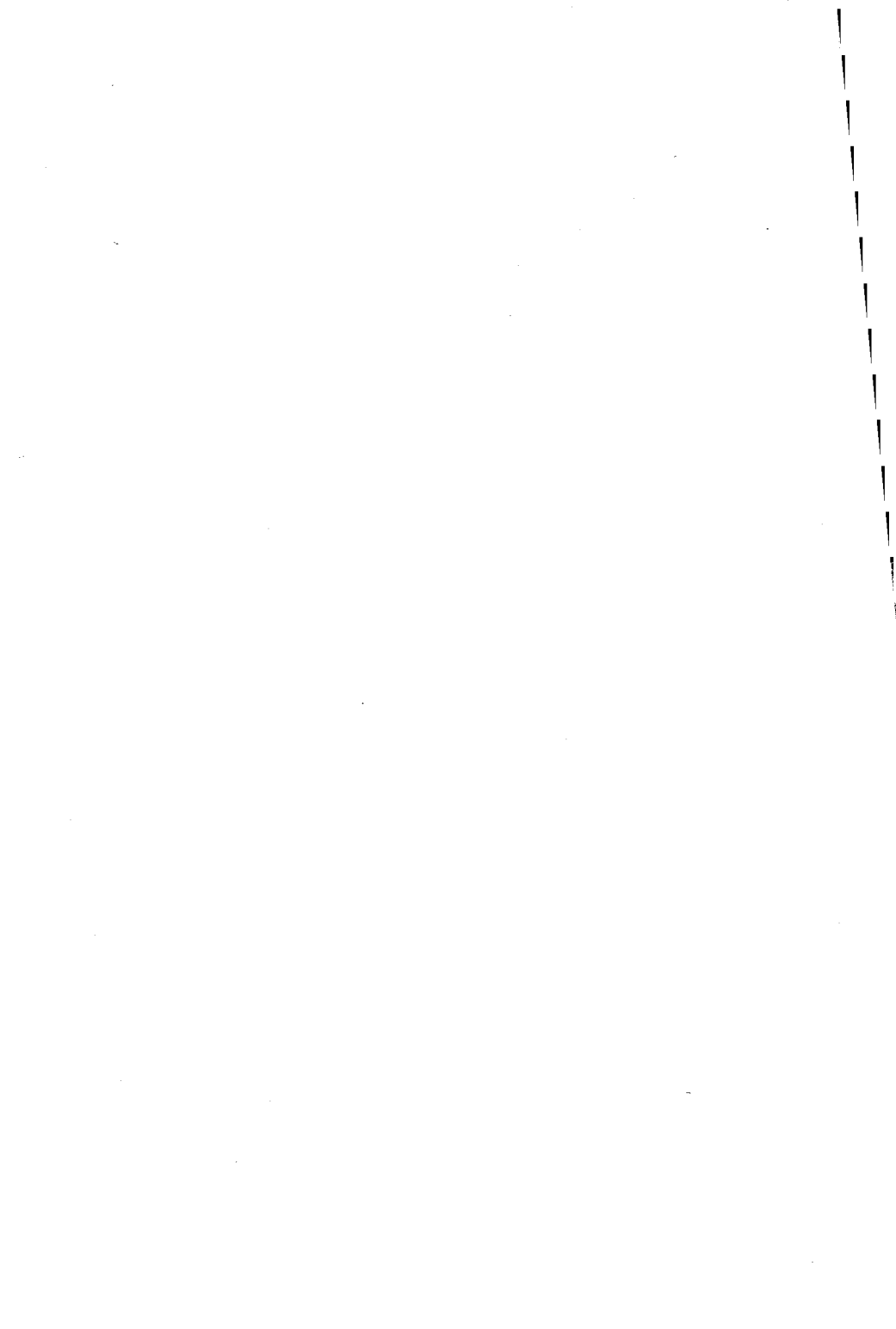
My boyfriend laughed and making a joke said, “but my calling card’s already at its limit,” thinking that this man would take the joke and leave us alone. But he didn’t.

“Well okay then,” the man said. “You be the operator and I’ll be the one calling.” We all laughed as the roar from the approaching train kept us from having to respond.

He followed us to our seats, cone and all, and sat across from us. “I have a



CHRIS JURGENSON



submarine,” he said, proudly.

“You do?” my boyfriend asked.

“Yes. I keep it for \$5. For cheap. That’s a great deal,” he said, the used car salesman returning.

“Where do you keep it?” I asked him.

“It’s not mine!” he said defensively.

“Then whose is it?” my boyfriend asked.

“You know, anything that can be tied can be untied.” He mimed with his hand the motion and I saw two frayed ropes being dismantled, loosened, freed.

“Now, you talk. Ask me anything!” he said to me, leaning back in his seat.

I looked at the man with his bruises and noticed numbers written on his left hand. I wanted to know how his eye was cut but instead I asked, “why do you have numbers on your arm?” He grew sober although I could smell the whiskey on his breath even from where I sat.

“Because they are my phone numbers and sometimes I forget them,” he said with a dead face. He leaned down to the side and moved the cone so that it sat between his feet.

“I’ve been organizing a movement.” The light was back in his eyes. He’d forgotten about the numbers. “Usually I talk one to one.” He was speaking directly to my boyfriend now. “Not meaning to ignore you,” he said quickly to me and then turned back to his male audience. “I pick up newspapers, then stack them under just one seat on just one train. Just one train so that they’ll see them. They’ll wonder why only one train and they won’t know who did it,” he said proudly, including us in his conspiracy.

“Ah,” my boyfriend said, playing along.

“You see, they’ll find them, then they won’t know.” He bent down for more newspapers under the seat and added those to his collection.

“Now, you talk,” he said, turning back to me. “What was the name of the first boy you kissed?”

“Todd,” I answered automatically and was surprised.

“What was your first teacher’s name?”

“Mrs. Beckue,” I thought but before I answered, his questions began shooting at me with high force and speed.

“What do you do? Where’ve you been? Where are you going? Enough now. You be the operator,” he said and put his hand up to his ear like he was holding a receiver. “Ringy Ding Dingy. Ringy Ding Dingy. Ringy Ding Dingy.”

Just then I noticed all of the people seated around us on the train. They were suppressing their laughter, holding their hands over their mouths.

“Does that mean that I’m in Tanzania?” I asked him, trying to be funny.

“No, you’re here,” he said. “The CIA know you’re here.” His head jerked to the side. “If they’d oil this track then the train wouldn’t squeak on the curves.

You see, they used five-foot track but if they'd used four-foot, standard, this train could go to Florida, to Mexico, up to Canada." *Then they could be free* I thought.

"I also think that children could make place mats for the trains, color them in, then eat off of them. Merging the practical with the artistic." He sat back in his seat again like an old professor.

"Hey, that's a good idea!" my boyfriend said encouragingly. "You've got a lot of good ideas."

"I know," the man answered. "I'm full of 'em. I'm also full of shit." He smiled and I saw his teeth, yellowed and crooked. "Now, really," he said, the smile fading. "What do you do?" he asked with the same paternal tone that all of my father's law partners use when I see them at the annual Christmas dinner.

"I write." I said, trying to convince him. And myself.

"What do you write?" he asked.

"Stories."

"About what?"

"About people."

"What kind of people?"

"Ordinary people," I said, looking him straight in the eye.

He stopped for a breath then went on. "Do you write on bound?" he asked.

"Word processor," I answered with a smile.

"You should work on bound," he said authoritatively. Then you can donate them to your archives." He went on. "I used to type, you know." He motioned with his fingers, making them dance in the air. "I was good too. But they asked me what I was gonna be — a secretary?" His tone changed to bitterness. "I said 'Yes, if I can be.' It's all gone downhill from there," he said solemnly. His fingers, that moments before had been dancing, fell into his lap.

When the train stopped, we gathered our things. He grabbed his cone and told us to have a good night. "My name's Paul," he said. "Like the apostle."

He shook hands with my boyfriend. His hands were covered with grit and grime, scarred by the filth of the street. Colored by the stains that had rumbled his coat, cut his eye, bruised his face and given him these muddled fragments, these small pieces, these tiny morsels. All pulled together, all fitting side by side, linked into the semblance of sanity. But there lay the illusion and I noticed his cone which stood beside him loyally.

Street workers place them carefully in cities across the country. From New York to Los Angeles, they are meant as a warning, a barrier — something to stop people, to hold them back from getting too close to broken pavement, or to a deep, dark hole. A hole so dense that once enveloped, there is no escape. This man was warning us.

Too bad, nobody had warned him.

GREGORY LEE KINNE

REPRESSION

“The repression
of sexuality is the
main cause of our
society’s neurosis”

he wasn’t sure she
could follow what
he was saying

(she was so young
that he wondered how
she got in the bar
in the first place)

she considered this
for a moment

tilting her head
to one side
and making her lips
pouty

he sensed that
she was a little
lost
but
he continued anyway:

“Sigmund Freud

Carl Jung
and Alestair Crowley
will back me up
on this”

he took a sip of
whiskey
and went on:

“let people experience
their own sexuality
without a built in
societal guilt complex
and the world would
be a much saner place”

“I suppose that’s
true enough”
she answered
“but what about
homosexuality?”

she was cute

he thought

but young
and
really not my

type

“Hmmm”

she said

“well”

he began

she sipped at the
glass of wine he
bought for
her

“there is no
objective reason
for our society to
have any objections
to homosexuality”

they talked about
unimportant things
for a while

“certain Native American
tribes accepted
homosexuality as a
part of life and made
space for it within
their society”

then finished
their drinks
and
decided to
leave

“The shock troops
of the Roman Empire
in fact
were made up of
homosexual couples
and at the time
they were the most
feared army in the
world”

it was dark outside
and as they both
stood shivering
in the parking lot

she surprised him
by asking for his
phone
number

he felt that he'd
probably thrown in
too many references that
she wasn't familiar
with
but
what the hell

he gave her
his card

I'll never
call
he thought
as she wrote
her number on
his palm

he was on a roll
and she was
probably a little
impressed

he watched her
walk to her
car

trying to make
her look better
than she
did

but she was
too young
cute
but not
attractive
to him

nympho
he thought

STACY LYNN SNYDER

THE PRINCESS STORY

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A PRINCESS WHO LIVED IN A castle complete with a moat and a tower located in the deep recesses of the woods. She wore a pointed hat with a lavender veil that touched the floor. Often, in her younger days as she would prance around the castle and run amuck up and down the tower's stairs, she would trip and fall and hit her head. Fortunately, none of her injuries were serious and she grew up to be a beautiful and insightful young princess.

This princess' father was the king of the woods and the river that ran through it. He was a fair and mighty kind who ruled with a stern hand and a glimmer in his eye. He had been king for over thirty years. And he quite enjoyed it. In the second year of his reign, the king took a wife. Because of the lack of available would-be queens in the woods and river area, the king was forced to expand his influence elsewhere and purchased his bride through the mail. Fortunately, the king purchased a beautiful would-be queen, and that, my reader, is where the princess with the pointed hat and lavender veil got her looks.

Her two brothers, however, were not that fortunate. While both princes were handsome, by moderate standards, neither could boast the beauty of their mother or younger sister. So instead they busied themselves with the tasks of becoming the next king, and astrology. While the eldest took the chore of the former, the younger brother became quite learned in the stars and planets. His skills became so refined that people from far away lands often traveled great distances to discuss with him the ways of the universe and how it could benefit them. Needless to say, this younger prince became quite wealthy, much to the disgust of his father the king.

One day, as the princess gathered her veil into her hands and began the long run up the tower stairs, she felt something in the air. Perhaps it was the antcipa-



JENNIFER FEITELBERG

tion of things to come. Or perhaps it was the feel of early spring. Or perhaps, it was just the humidity rising off of the moat. In any case, the princess ran up the stairs as she had so many times before in her young life, in the hope of finally being able to climb to the top of the tower and not trip and fall. This would be quite a feat considering there were over fifteen hundred steps to be climbed. Finally after almost an hour and several rest breaks, the princess reached the crest of the tower and paused to look over the kingdom that belonged to her father and would one day belong to her eldest brother. Unless he died. Then it would go to her next oldest brother. Odds were pretty slim on it ever belonging to her. And that was fine with her because she did not want to trade her pointed hat and veil for the crown.

The princess walked over to the window and surveyed the view. It never ceased to amaze her how high she was. She looked down at the ground and saw her eldest brother practicing the art of fencing. Her mother the mail-order-bride queen was also strolling the grounds among a throng of attendants.

Further into the woods, a bird flew up into the sky and flew toward the princess who strained out the window to catch it. The princess, unfortunately, strained too far out, lost her balance, and tumbled toward the ground.

She accelerated as she fell and hit the ground in under four seconds. When she finally landed, her neck snapped and she died.

Her mother, the mail-order-bride queen, and her brother the would-be king, screamed in horror as they watched her fall to her lecherous death. As she fell, the princess with the pointed hat and lavender veil heard them scream and she screamed also, that is until her lavender veil wrapped around her neck and closed her windpipe.

After her body had thudded to the earth, her mother the mail-order-bride queen thought *how tragic*. Then she continued with her walk amongst her many attendants.

TOM TAPP

W I N T E R

THE WINTERS SEEMED TO BE GETTING LONGER AND THE years shorter.

He stepped out of the idling sedan and turned to wave but it sped off, trailing a white sheet of exhaust. The snow and frozen slush near the gutter were mottled brown, the color of his overcoat and the suitcase in his hand. Instead of going inside where the wind wasn't, he walked across the street to a phone booth and made the call.

He slid the glass door closed to keep out the wind.

"Jenny, put mommy on. Yes honey. Put mommy on."

"Darlene ... yes ... I — all right. Goodbye."

He crossed the street again and went up a flight of stairs next to an alley. At the top of the stairs he moved down a hall past doors until he got to the one marked 2B. He took out a key on a gnarled wire chain and opened it.

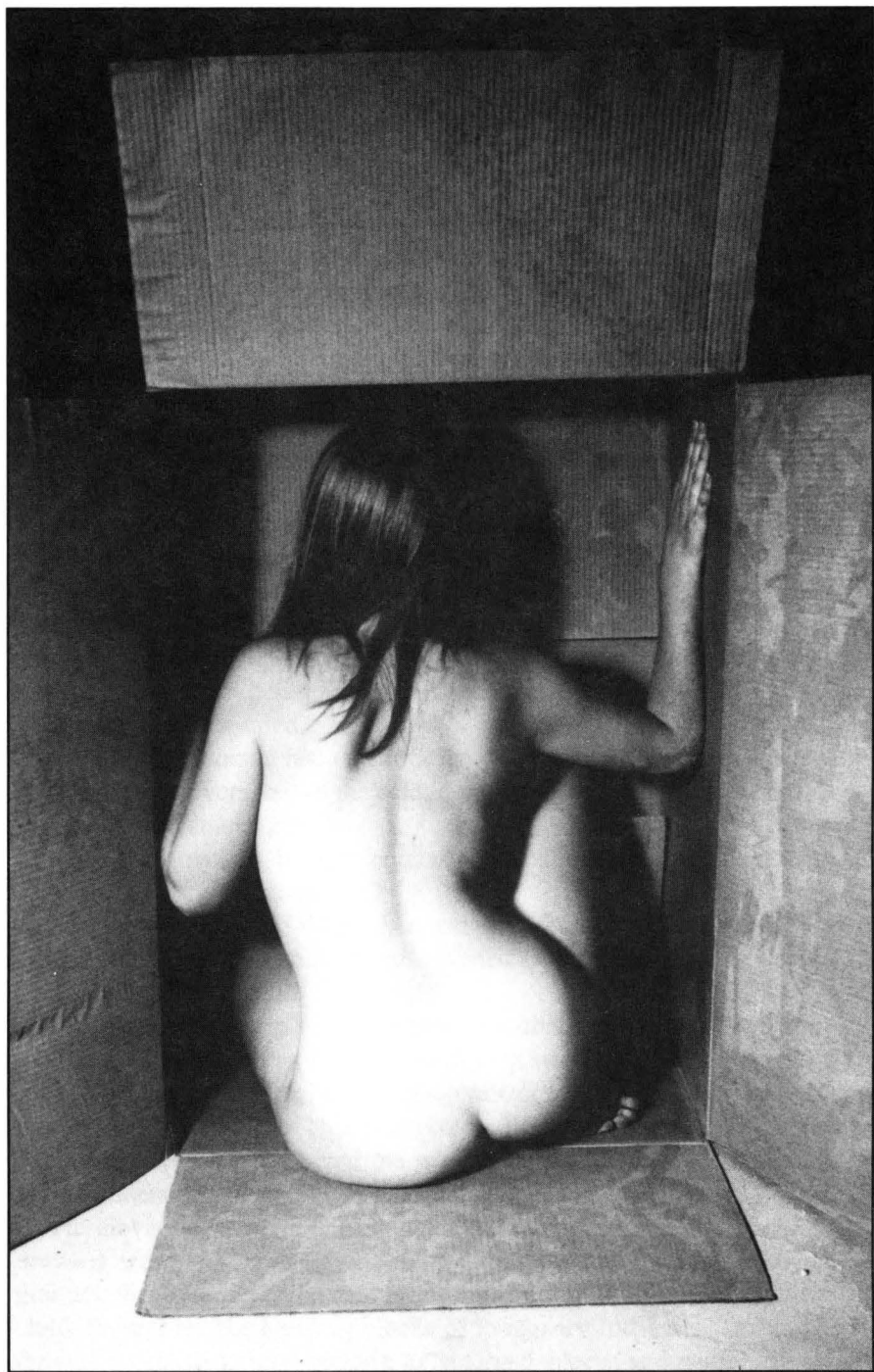
Inside were the usual amenities. Bar soap, clean toilet, water glass, ice bucket.

He went down the hall and filled the bucket.

He put the bucket in the middle of the bed next to where he had placed the suitcase. Opening the suitcase, the man removed what appeared to be a jar of pickle relish and placed it in the bucket. He read the label through the ice. It said: *serve well chilled*.

He assembled a rigging from the other contents of the suitcase. A plastic funnel was attached to a small valve with a hook on the side. This was connected to several feet of half-inch tubing. To the end of this was attached a soft rubber nozzle, not unlike a saxophone mouthpiece, but smaller. He took the whole thing into the bathroom and mounted it on the side of the shower door.

He turned on the radio and listened to a fight before noticing the beads of condensation forming on the jar. He took a towel, wrapped it around the jar and



CHRIS JURGENSON

went into the bathroom. The man cracked the seal on the jar and it snapped as the air released. It smelled faintly sweet. The jar was held over the funnel and tilted so most of the contents spilled in. As the black stuff made its way down the tube toward the floor, the man dropped his pants and forced the soft rubber of the nozzle up his ass. Bending over the toilet, his knees went weak and he sank to the floor when the cold substance entered him.

He thought of her and the way she had been. Soft and sweet, her sagging old chin held up only by the gate of her collapsing mouth. Skin so smooth, almost like a baby. Her cunt had looked gray, sagging and hairless except for those few stubborn bristles that held on. They didn't seem human, more like a horse's mane or paintbrush hairs. The folds of her stomach were crossed with children and scars. Maybe some from operations, maybe some from lovers who had been too rough. Now it was his turn and he found himself enjoying it, smoothing the sagging breasts that parted as easily as her knees when she was on her back.

He was younger, but not as young as he used to be. She had invited him home from the bar near the hospital where he had just gotten a checkup.

"Come on, it's dark out," she had said outside the bar. "Nobody here but you and me." She tugged him by the elbow, half drunken.

So he had gone with her in the old gray sedan. Partly to keep out of the cold, partly to keep from going home, partly because she would give him money, partly because he wanted to.

And the old woman had taken it. She wheezed and coughed — but so did he. Under the covers, out of the cold, it was amazingly warm and soft.

She let him smoke in bed.

Soon her breathing became regular and slow in its ragged rattle. He carefully peeled back the covers.

The floor was cold in the kitchen and the refrigerator was stocked with the things old people eat: bran, prunes, canned fruit, ice cream. He opened the freezer and found a bottle of vodka.

The glasses had soap stains on them and made the vodka taste cheap.

The kitchen table was white Formica with small gold flecks: the night sky in reverse. On it was a lighted make-up mirror and a bag full of lipsticks and rouges. An ashtray full of cigarettes, colored stains at the end of each, sat next to the mirror. He remembered the woman's painted nails, seeing the coarse grainy underside of them when she smoked.

He moved around the house opening drawers and checking shelves. The drawers were full of things once wonderful to him as a little boy in his grandmother's house. Dull scissors, a deck of cards, hair curlers, pennies. To a child, these were the building blocks of imaginary fortresses; stolen, carried through rooms to a secret deposit; to be turned, placed and muttered over.

There was a garden outside. Summer fruit drooped on the stalks. He recognized corn, bell peppers, and tomato bushes. It all moved crisply in the wind.

In the bathroom were used Q-Tips, multiple bottles of aspirin, and a crushed tube of KY jelly.

The old woman was standing at the door when he turned.

“What are you looking for?” she wheezed, bleary eyed and shaking in the cold of the house.

“I don’t know,” said the young man.

Then holding up his glass, “Vodka, I guess.”

“Well, all you’re going to find in the bathroom is rubbing alcohol. Come on and get out of there, I’ve got to pee.”

He shuffled past her, turning sideways, and stood just outside the door. The woman closed it behind her. He heard the stream in the toilet, sometimes strong but mostly intermittent and strained. He heard her cough and spit when she was done.

“Getting old is awful,” she said when she came out. “Don’t let anyone tell you different.”

He was mute.

“My neck hurts. Will you rub it?”

He nodded assent.

She led him back to bed. She turned on her stomach and he mounted her carefully. He massaged the folds of her neck and soon she began her regular difficult pattern of breathing. Out her bedroom window was the garden.

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” That was the question that everyone asked when you were young.

Once, a barber asked him that question.

“A bum,” he responded.

The man was shocked and didn’t know what to say.

His mother was embarrassed and hit him as soon as they left the shop.

Outside the cold air stung the garden.

He wanted some of his mother’s stew at that moment, but was disturbed by the old woman’s voice.

“Okay. I guess it’s time to take you home.”

He realized he had stopped rubbing.

At her intimation he got up, put his pants on, and waited out in the living room for her.

She came out and handed him a small stack of bills.

“Anything else?”

He thought.

“Yeah,” he said, “do you have an old suitcase I can have?”

The woman was surprised. “What do you need that for?”

“To pick up some things.”

“Well I guess we could have a look in the garage.”

The old door was heavy and sodden with rain. He helped her lift it and she went in. It was dark inside and he wondered how she could see. She came out with an old, wide traveling case that had once been quite nice. She handed it to him and led him to the car.

He gave her directions as she drove. Then he began to cry.

The woman stared straight over the wheel, not noticing.

The car was warm and he liked it. He sank into the seat and listened to the tires on the road and kept sobbing.

“Are you going to do that all night?” the woman asked.

He looked at her and felt very small.

“Well?”

“I don’t know what else to do,” he said quietly.

“Do you have a family?”

He was surprised. “How did you know?”

“You have a ring on.”

“Oh.”

The old woman curled her lips around a cigarette and lit it. “What will your wife say when she sees you like this? I’d kick your ass.”

“She won’t,” he said.

She pulled the car up outside the low suburban house he had directed her to. Without a word he got out and ran up the steps, suitcase flapping at his side.

When he came back out he walked slowly, overcoat pulled tight. He felt the wind-dried tears stretch the skin of his face. The woman opened the door for him.

“Where now?” she asked as she drove off.

He gave her new directions.

When she stopped he stepped out of the idling sedan. The old woman sped off. The car trailed a white sheet of exhaust. The snow and frozen slush near the gutter were a mottled brown, the color of the suitcase. His feet were losing the warmth of the car’s heater. Instead of going inside, up to the room and out of the wind, he walked across the street.

He slid the glass door closed to block the wind.

SHARON BECKER

HOLLYWOOD bed

There is a space,
a sliced wedge of time —
thin, green and — a risky word —
revolutionary, when I swing
to the edge of my bed.
A place where nothing
is better than The Blasters,
nothing better than draped
50's suits and hair
brushed back from wide foreheads.

A suspended moment that shrinks
from the first, across the ocean
origins and settles into dust
that covers, secretly pleases
carefully shined black shoes.
Now there is something brown
about this place —
bare feet on carpet,
my head still new and growing
back into it's old, unslept form.

Simple as a gift of a new dress,
the shape of a man's brocade
vest — teasing because it's hidden
under a carefully buttoned jacket.
The underneathness of it all —
a society that moves somewhat without
the knowledge that there are things

going on elsewhere.

The blue collar birth
from the belly of Elvis,
the solidity of silver skeleton
rings and rings that boast
a single, round black onyx.
What am I waiting for?
I stand up and actually put on
The Blasters and get to the work
of readying myself. As daughters,
sisters I wish we could grip wrists
and spin in a slow circle
and then widen the circle out

so the middle could include
the backrooms of jazz record
stores, and 45's released in 1956.
Cigarettes that look delicate and acceptable
in thin, slightly yellowed holders
and shot glasses etched
with crude, bulky dice and the name
of a funny sounding state like Oklahoma.

It's a feasible thing, I think,
an inevitable thing like clipping
my fingernails down to boyish
rounds or the straight hang
of my hair. This section of time,
my first pull into morning,
sighs like finely woven material
caught between the crux of crossed
legs (the album is almost over)
and it smells simple as hair pomade.

CHIP ERIKSON

HIM

May (the earlier part)

He's dying. He hasn't told me this, but it doesn't matter. *I know*. He's in bed with a sheet wrapped around his head and jaw. Like Curly with a toothache.

"I can't move."

him

We're drinking White Zinfandel and taking some of the pain pills his doctor gave him. I tilt the plastic cup back to his lips and he swallows. *He really can't move.*

Long, long before (in fact, it might not've happened)

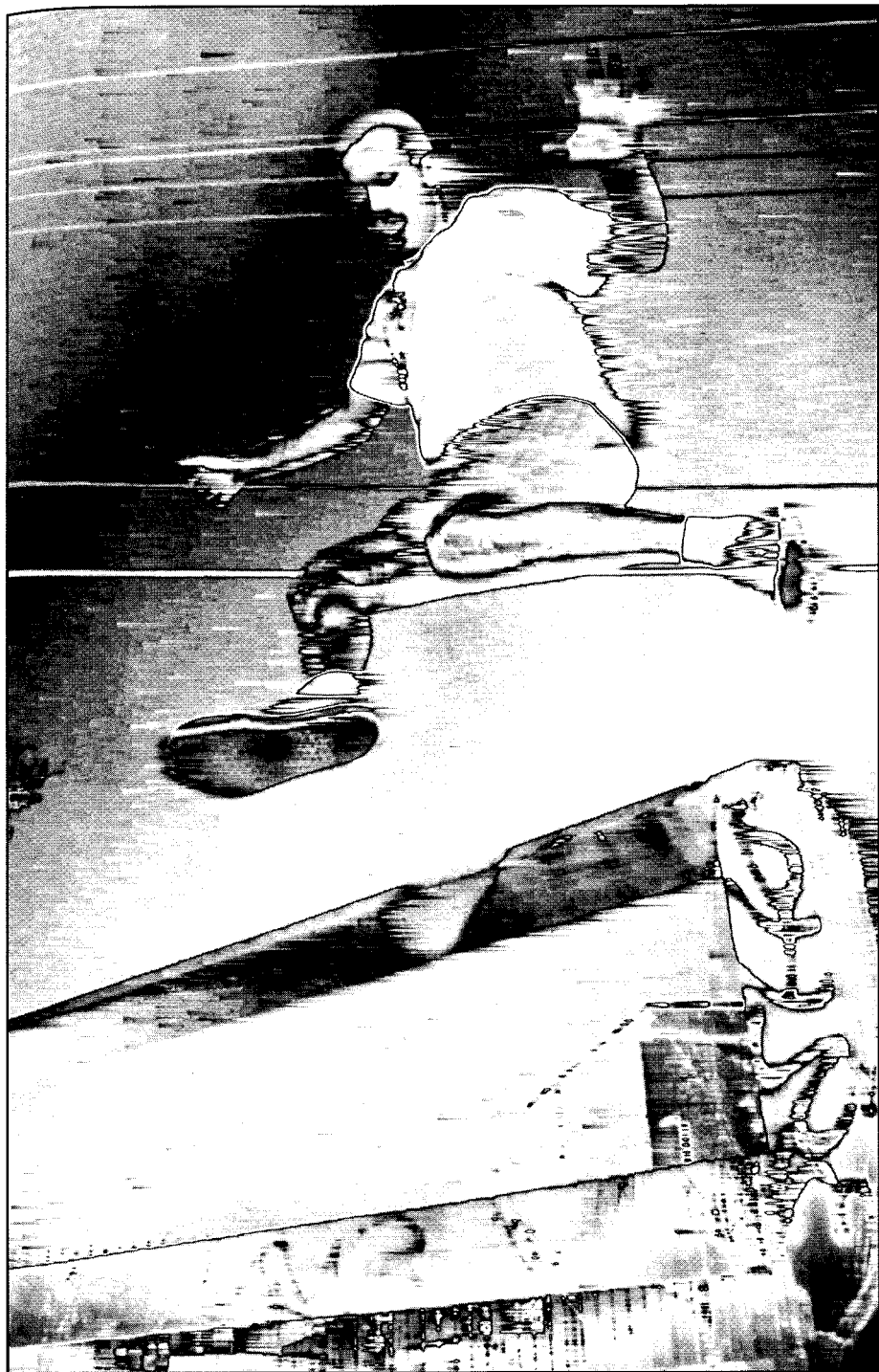
The speed is incredible. Not the *sense* of speed but the actual speed. Thirteen year old boys sometimes reach 50 miles-per-hour when they're running downhill. I swear to God.

"My feet aren't touching the ground!"

him

I'm laughing so hard I can't answer. When you're moving this fast, you can't help it. It's funny.

There are bigger, angry kids right behind us. On bikes. But they won't catch us. The field is right in front of us, and they'll have to get off their bikes to





follow us in.

We reach the low fence around the field and leap it like hurdlers.

Stop
In midair

It's this moment that I'll never forget:

We're in the air, and nobody, not even bigger kids who just got hit by water balloons can catch us. We're in perfect synch, we've jumped this fence so many times before, and we know exactly where we'll land, and exactly where we'll run to after we land. In this moment, we are Gods. We could've hovered over the fence if we wanted to.

5 years later

We're in my mother's Chevrolet Caprice at the drive-in, drinking Mickey's Big Mouths and eating those shitty hot dogs they sell. Sometimes we fart and the vinyl seat makes them vibrate. This still makes me laugh.

I don't know how it came up. The loops and tangents a conversation follows are impossible to remember, but the bigger points tend to stay with you.

"I think I like guys."

him

I wanted to tell him I already knew, but I could tell he wanted to *tell* me. So I made myself look surprised.

"Not *you*, you know, but
other guys. I think about
what it would feel like to
sleep with a man."

him

And that was it. We talked a few more minutes about it, then I farted and we laughed for a while. We stayed for both movies.

6 years later

We're 24. Both pursuing jobs in the *entertainment* industry. He's an actor and I'm a writer, although I can't remember having written anything.

The guy who takes tickets at the Nuart looks at us suspiciously. Were we the ones who left beer bottles under the seats last week? He gives us our change and we walk past, the bottles clinking quietly under our coats.

I ask him about his surfer-guy.

He laughs. When he laughs there's a low rattle in his lungs, like he's getting over a cold.

“Why can't you ever call him Ken?”

him

I tell him because he doesn't look like a Ken, he looks like a surfer-guy. I ask him what his parents think, and we both start laughing. Quietly at first, then we're hysterical. Tears are streaming down his face as he manages a quick sentence:

“They're happy that I've finally found a nice Jewish girl.”

him

We fall off our seats, trying to clutch our cokes.

We've never laughed so hard in our lives. The manager comes down and kicks us out.

May

I'm working on a *project* and I haven't called him for a while. I go to his restaurant. It pisses him off when I order cappuccinos, because he has to make them. So I order them whenever possible.

He's not there. Hasn't been for two weeks I'm told. Tell him to get well, we need him back.

Before that (March, I think)

He finds out that one of his friends is dying. I get right to the point: *did you sleep with this guy?* He doesn't answer, and suddenly I want to cry. I'm pissed off and angry, because my best friend has no right to risk his life without consulting *me first*.

"I'm not getting tested. They say that stress only makes it worse, and if I knew I had it I'd be a mess."

him

He coughs again and I want to grab him by his shirt and take him to the hospital, because *I know* that when we're together, in synch, we can beat *anything*.

But I didn't. Amazingly, there are certain boundaries of respect you never want to cross.

Some Night in May (after we drank wine together)

He called me in the middle of the night.

"I'm sweating all over the place."

him

I asked him if he wanted me to come over.

"No. You'd bring wine or beer and we'd get drunk and I *know* I'd get sick."

him

We talked about nothing for a while, then he simply told me. Like he was telling me the Laker's score. The weirdest thing: he sounded *relieved*.

The Terrible Events In June

This disease carries so much fucking baggage with it. It's not enough that

you're dying, but you're marked: *He's got the plague, the fag-plague, the drug-user plague, he's EVIL! I'll bet he's had sex with black people and monkeys! The green ones from Africa!*

His parents are *religious*. You know, the religion where you're supposed to love even your worst enemy? They won't come to see him. They are shocked that he's gay.

"It's a sin, and I'm sorry. He's
my son and I love him very much,
but he shouldn't have been involved
in that lifestyle."

his mother

I'm on the phone with her for over an hour. I've already thrown my favorite mug against the wall and hit my refrigerator door with my fist. I think someone in my building has called the cops.

She won't budge. Her husband feels the same way. In fact, *he's ashamed*. Not quite sure if he should tell the relatives. **WHAT'S THE FUCKING DIFFERENCE WHAT YOUR SON IS DYING OF?!!** I try to pose this as politely as possible.

"I'm sorry, you're very angry.
You've made me upset again. I'm
hanging up."

his mother

Then there's *a lot* of glass breaking. I pull out my shelves and throw them into my den, hitting my TV. This isn't something I've carefully thought out, so I unintentionally break *all* my dishes. I think about UPS-ing the broken glass to his parents.

The House

I can't write or say that other word anymore. The one that starts out like *hospital*. I just can't do it. Anyway, that's where I go. I'm pissed because the air conditioner in my car doesn't work and I'm sweating like a dog.

I've brought him the new Sam Kinison. There's some stuff on it that'll make

him laugh. He loves jokes about homosexuals, particularly Kinison's.

I park outside the house. It's a nice place on the southern border of Hancock Park. I'm going to come here every single day if I can.

We're going to switch tenses, because I'd like this next bit to remain in the past. There's a man outside the house, a neighbor, I was told later. He carried a sign, like he was on strike. I don't remember what it said, but it was angrily worded and said he didn't want *this ... house* in his neighborhood. *Children play in front of this house for God'sakes!*

I walked toward the house and tried not to look at the man or his sign. He was a big guy though, and he was hard *not* to look at. I could tell he wanted to get in my way, but was reluctant to do so in case I was one of "them." Instead, he mumbled something under his breath. It sounded like "dirty faggot." I bit my lip. I told myself I wasn't going to get involved in the politics of this thing, it would take too much energy out of me. Energy I could spend taking care of my best friend. He said it again, but added something *very* derogatory this time. Something he hoped would happen to all gay people. I'm not gay, but it hit me as strongly as if I was.

Then he's sitting on the grass and his nose is turned to the side. He's put his hands on his face and he's trying to scream through the blood: *I'm calling the cops, I'm calling the cops!* I hoped he would, maybe they'd take his sign away.

The last part

He died. I know this sounds like a movie, but I was there. I was holding his hand. Caressing it, like his mother should've been. I knew he was gone, but I kept wiping my tears off his face anyway.

He said something about his mother before he died, but I can't remember what it was. She came to the funeral and I told her that he wanted me to tell her that he loved her. I was hoping this would make her cry, but didn't stick around to find out.

Later, dusk

I'm running. I'm still wearing my suit, but I took off my dress shoes. My feet are tough and I'm sprinting on the pavement, trying to reach 50. There's a

gate by my house, and I zero in on it ...

This is somebody else's house, but I don't give a fuck. I'm so mad, I'm like a lunatic, a train gone out of control, and nobody better get in my way —

I'm yards away from the gate, and suddenly the big kids are behind us again, on bikes, but *we're* faster — I plant my foot far away, *I've really gotta get some air to clear this thing ...*

Jumping
higher

higher
together, again, in midair
we both have wings
and for a split-second
(that tiny fraction of time that actually lasts a lifetime)
we're thirteen again,
and nothing else matters.

ROLIN JONES

CONNER^{THE} INVISIBLE

Timmy Tommy Sam and Linda all
said the party was boring and
called their parents to pick
them up NoW So while Linda s
father caught every red light
we sat and watched the rain fall
Jenny cursed God for raining
out her birthday every time
she opened the door for friENDS
and laid some party favors on
them Outside the rain became
hail and that CraZy kid Conner
ran outside and yelled
THESKYISFALling
as he spun himself
counter-clock-ways
Conner the second to last to
leave went running home Later
I drove past him with my yo-yo
hovering in mid air Dad stopped
for a red as I watched Connor s
pink torch of Cotton Candy
dribble down his arm
dissolving
into
nothing
with the raindrops
he was dodging

DAMON LEWIS

DISCHARGED

THE JAILER CHECKED UP ON ME ABOUT EVERY HOUR OR SO. He did it more often on my last visit to the brig. By now he knew I was a model inmate. I never nodded off, didn't make noise, and didn't lay on the rack during the day. I guess I would have been saintly if I read the small bible. Actually, I would have read it if I could have kept a steady train of thought, but it's hard to concentrate when you're starving. Whoever thought of having a sailor do three days of bread and water for punishment was smart. It painfully extracted a lot out of a person and made one feel pretty damn docile.

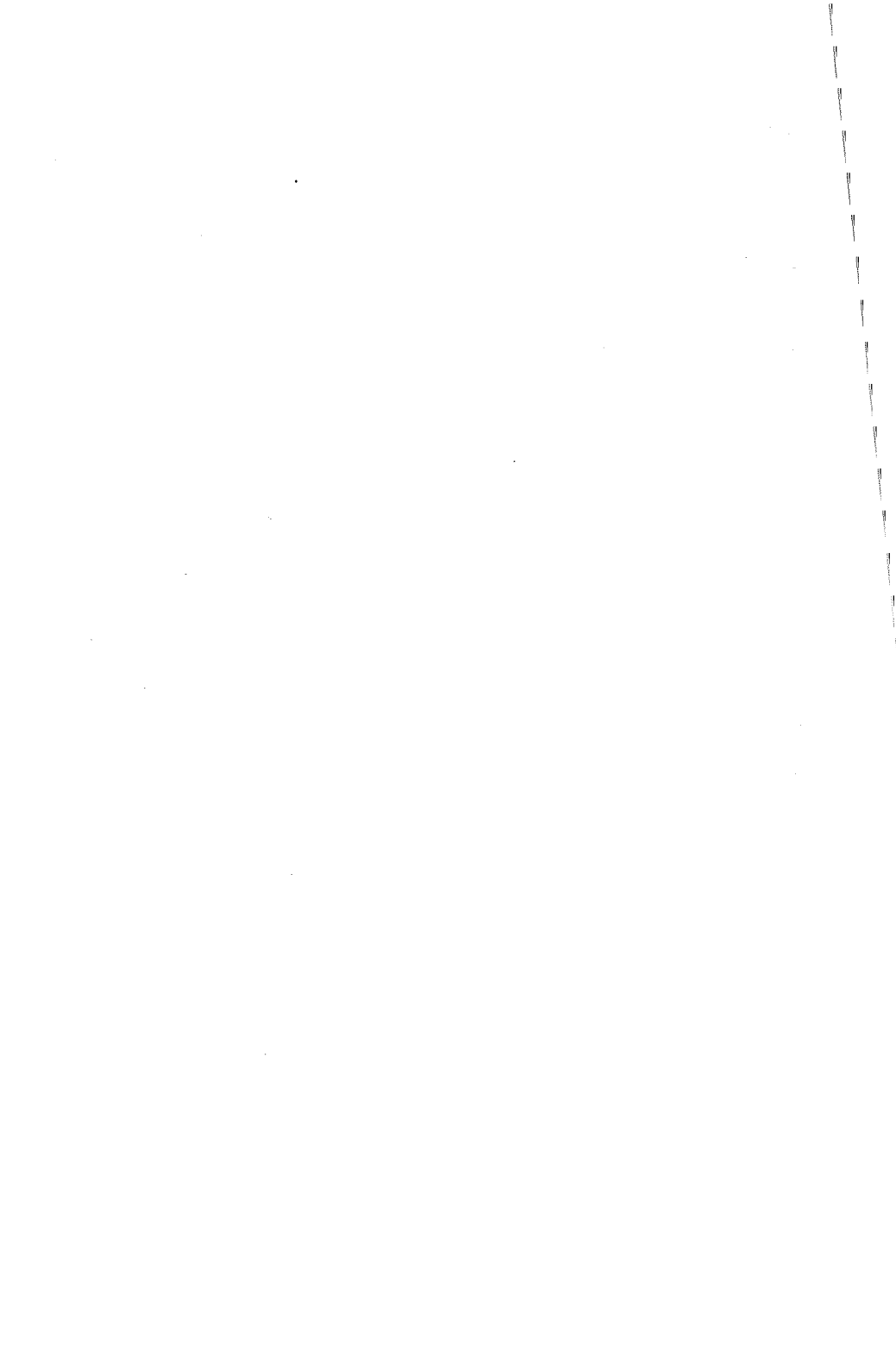
I meditated for a while by clearing my mind and staring at one of the green cell bars. Soon my eyelids grew heavy, and not wanting to break the no sleeping till lights out rule, I did some pushups, situps, and ran in place. Yet I inevitably wound up weak and lonely on the hard wooden chair, squirming with disjointed thoughts. My parents came to mind often. I envisioned my dad scowling at me over ruining the Navy career he pushed me into. Then I remembered my mother, standing between us, patting us on the chest so we wouldn't growl and attack each other like pit bulls. Strange how our worst feelings came out when my mother was around. I guess deep down my father and I knew she was the control, allowing us to vent our hatred without ripping each others throats out. Well, I didn't plan to contact them when I got out of the Navy. I didn't want to disappoint my mother who had always believed in me, and I didn't want to hear my father saying, "I told you he was a screw-up."

My parents thought the Navy would help me to control my drinking and make a man out of me, but three months out of bootcamp, I was still the same stubborn party animal, the only change being I wore a Navy uniform.

I stood, shook the bars for emphasis and sat down when I heard the jingling of the guard's keys.



TOM MORAN



“Everything alright Matthews?”

I nodded, embarrassed, then smirked realizing the jailer looked a lot like my nemesis on board ship, the Thomas C. Hart. All he needed was a beard to frame his weathered chubby face. I considered telling him he reminded me of a jerk I knew, then I changed my mind and asked him how many hours I had till lights out.

Sleep was a little rough with my body crying out for food. I tried meditating some more, but my hunger wouldn't allow it. I thought back to two nights ago when the first waves of major hunger pangs had dissipated to be replaced by a subtle steady gnawing, reluctantly encouraged by fantasies of steak, pizza and ice cream. Now it wasn't so bad, for every moment brought me closer to a meal and freedom.

The clanking sound of my cell door being opened woke me. I rolled out of bed bleary-eyed and ravenous, patting at the wrinkles in my work clothes. I followed the jailer like a clinging puppy, hoping I wasn't being taken back to the ship under guard. All I wanted was some food and a few drinks in peace. Going back to the ship now would be akin to extending my sentence. I got a little excited when I was taken outside the wire mesh prison area and into the screening lobby. I looked toward the exit door, then back at the jailer.

He handed me my wallet and peacoat, speaking gruffly, “your orders are to report to your ship.” I nodded, giving him a sarcastic, “Aye, Aye, Sir,” and left.

The vending machine, that dingy hunk of plastic and metal, looked like a champagne brunch at the Ritz Carlton. My joy was only partly realized because all I had was a hundred, some twenties and two single dollars. The ham sandwich I bought was great, but not as heavenly as the three I had money for the last time I did bread and water.

I walked away from the vending machine toward the base exit tense with fear. I passed the Marine guard shack hoping the ship hadn't given the Marines orders to detain me. When I glanced sideways at them, I was relieved they were more interested in who came into the base than who left. Quickening my pace on the way to the bus stop, I imagined Block, the ship's Sergeant at Arms driving up beside me with the Shore Patrol to take me away. I felt more like a runaway slave than a criminal, because my only offense was that I refused to work. After all, it was nothing like the last incident when I broke Sanders' nose for calling me a punk. There was a lot of blood. It sort of spurting out of his nose the second I pulled my fist away from his face. I lost control, and was sorry, but the best part was when the preppy lily-white lieutenant came down the ladder, turned gray and threw up in a corner of the mess deck. I laughed. He called me an animal, and I wished I'd hit him instead.

The dingy blue and silver bus came. I gagged a bit on the exhaust fumes.

They reminded me of the dust clouds that would float through the ship when we were chipping and sanding the bulkheads in preparation for re-painting. It was one of those endless jobs where, when you thought you were almost done, you would have to add another coat there, here, all over until everyone in the ten man boatswain's division knew every inch of the ship. Fast frigate? To me it had as much area to paint and clean as an aircraft carrier.

There were no exotic lands or strategic military maneuvers as far as I could see. The recruiter really played me for a sucker. The promised hull technician (welding) school never materialized. It wasn't until after I was on board ship that I discovered I had to earn my school by serving a year in the boatswains division. Some "Navy Adventure." It was more like a nightmare.

I stared out the bus window on the way into Norfolk, where every bar had gangs from other ships and every woman was spoken for. I saw some cute buns in red pants and slid back the window to hoot, then sat back disgusted. It was a guy. There were always a lot of gay hustlers in military towns, that and hippie types who sold bogus drugs. The service seemed like the last chance for a lot of losers I thought; lonely, underachieving angry people, a lot like me. Alone or in groups, no amount of booze or drugs or sex could ever cover up the reality of our situation.

Seeing the beach ahead, I pulled the bell-cord. The bus stopped with a whoosh as I thanked the driver and hopped off, nearly slipping on the sand covered asphalt. Muffled by the beach and a row of small houses nearby, the waves thundered in like my anger and retreated softly like the mellow person I wanted to be. I went to a nearby liquor store and bought two burritos, a fifth of Bacardi and a half-gallon of Pepsi to go with it. The Oriental clerk gave me a knowing nod and I raised my eyebrows in return, happy I'd be partying soon. As I walked to the beach, I cradled the bag in the crook of my arm while I tore the wrappers off the burritos and gobbled them down.

Soon sloshing through the sand, I plopped down, opened the bottles and gave chase. First with Bacardi then with Pepsi, and kept going until the warm glow in my stomach and face permeated my body. I watched the waves for a while. They seemed pretty peaceful now. Then I lay back, inhaling the sweet salty air, so unlike the rusted oily stench of the ship. I stared at the clear blue sky, cozy in my Navy peacoat, and drifted off to sleep.

I awakened suddenly to a loud scream and sat up fast to see it was only a pelican flying by. I rose unsteadily, put my half-empty bottles back in the bag and tucked it under my arm. I weaved my way down the shore like a running back that just had his bell rung. Noticing a broken Budweiser bottle in my path, I picked it up and threw the bottle toward the sea, watching it glisten and spin to a quiet splash.

"Hey!"

I jumped and turned, She looked like some kind of homeless person. I approached her. "Hey, what!" I challenged.

She crossed her arms and looked at me playfully as my mouth dropped open. I was mesmerized by the tops of her breasts pushing up through her unbuttoned flannel shirt. "You shouldn't litter," she teased.

I stared. I mumbled, "Yo, you must be cold out here."

"Naw, I'm warm-blooded, and my room's close by."

She pointed with a flourish, showing off her long red nails. "Need a date sailor?" she laughed, "forty bucks."

On the way to the motel she told me her name was Caroline.

Though I was beside myself with lust, my nostrils flared with disdain at the peeling motel sign and its dim bulb. Her scuffed door had a crack in it along with a few imprints of people's knuckles. I got a little nervous. "You have jealous boyfriends or something?" She ignored me and ushered me inside. I looked over my shoulder as I went in and noted a manager sign on a door across from Caroline's room. She glanced away from me as I squinted at the peeling wallpaper and wrinkled my nose at the musty bed. I grabbed my bottle of Bacardi, took a healthy swig and put my forty dollars on the night table.

I gave Caroline a hug at the door and she grimaced. When I asked her what was wrong, she gave me a forced smile and told me she'd be around for a while. I made a small fuss over writing her address down on a matchbook cover, feeling foolish because I knew I'd never be back.

Walking to the bus stop, I remembered leaving my rum at the motel and didn't care. I was ready to go back to the ship. Soon the sense of wholeness that being with a woman always gave me started to fade, until it was just a thin shell of confidence being chipped away by self-doubt. I told myself I was a good man and wondered why my eyes watered.

The bus came. The driver looked at me poker-faced, probably thinking I was returning from unauthorized leave, I thought. Not many sailors came back to the base early on Friday night. I was still a little buzzed from the rum I drank a few hours ago, so I got off the bus a stop early and jogged the rest of the way to the base entrance to sober up for my fate aboard ship. Dizzy, I slowed down, gathered myself and flashed my military ID as I was waved by. I walked briskly back to the ship, anxious to get my next confrontation over with, but afraid all the same.

I scanned the decks for Block to no avail and strode up the creaky aluminum entry plank. My heart lifted a little because he was evidently gone for the weekend. The moment I said, "permission to come aboard," to the ensign, Block stepped out of the shadows by the forward missile launchers. Grateful he didn't

handcuff me, I followed him as he requested. Trying to look stoic while walking behind him, I considered jumping ship and going back to Norfolk. I was glad most of the crew had gone to town for the weekend, so they wouldn't see me lagging behind Block like a wimpy schoolboy. Holding my composure became more of a challenge as I began feeling woozy and tired stepping through hatch after hatch. We finally walked down the ladder to stop on the mess deck.

Block pointed toward the galley and spoke, "wash the pots and pans, I'll be on the mess deck with your next job. And Matthews, next time you get out of the brig, maybe you'll remember your not on a friggin' vacation."

The pots reached the low grease-stained ceiling of the galley. Most of them had burnt muck inside. I heard a noise by the serving trays outside and saw Block peeping at me through the serving windows. I waved and he turned away sour-faced. I turned the hot water on, then the cold, and scrubbed a pot half-heartedly with a crusty brillo pad while the sink filled with warm water. I stared at the huge rancid pile of pots and pans and thought of the cook, probably being told to burn the last of the potatoes or eggs or bacon drippings. Screw this, I thought.

Then another more twisted thought worked its way into my mind. I glanced around for Block, opened one of the utensil drawers and grabbed a knife. I drew it lightly across my wrist and examined the scratch, silently daring Block to stop me. I applied more pressure during the next cut and drew blood. Not satisfied by the slow oozing, I held the knife tightly and cut deeper. The blood began to drip from my wrist into the sink at a steady rate and turned the dish water pink. Then I grimly slashed my other wrist.

The wound throbbed and stung as I stretched my arms out before me. I stepped from the galley dripping a trail of blood across the worn linoleum floor to where Block sat reading. A small puddle reached his shoes by the time he lowered his magazine to address me. Block stood abruptly, dropping the copy of *Field and Stream*, and knocking over his chair. I wasn't sure what to expect and was relieved when he ran to the first-aid cabinet like a scared train porter in a Three Stooges movie. I stared down at my bloody wrists. Starting to sway on the balls of my feet, I hugged myself to slow the bleeding and leaned against the bulkhead.

JANA MYGA

Wounds

He was whole, made of wounds,
Wounds varied in depth and origin.
Some already covered with a delicate pink layer.
A steady pulse, a watchman, patiently beating underneath.

Others were cleaned and began to dry at the edges.
Sometimes a transparent drop
of lymphatic liquid would form in the corner and linger
with the persistence of a solitary tear.

And then, there were ones that were fresh and infected.
He cringed at the thought of being touched.
Still he went about, intentionally letting others
infect them again and again.

He knew he would have to be always freshly wounded
just to remain alive.

AMY M. LAM

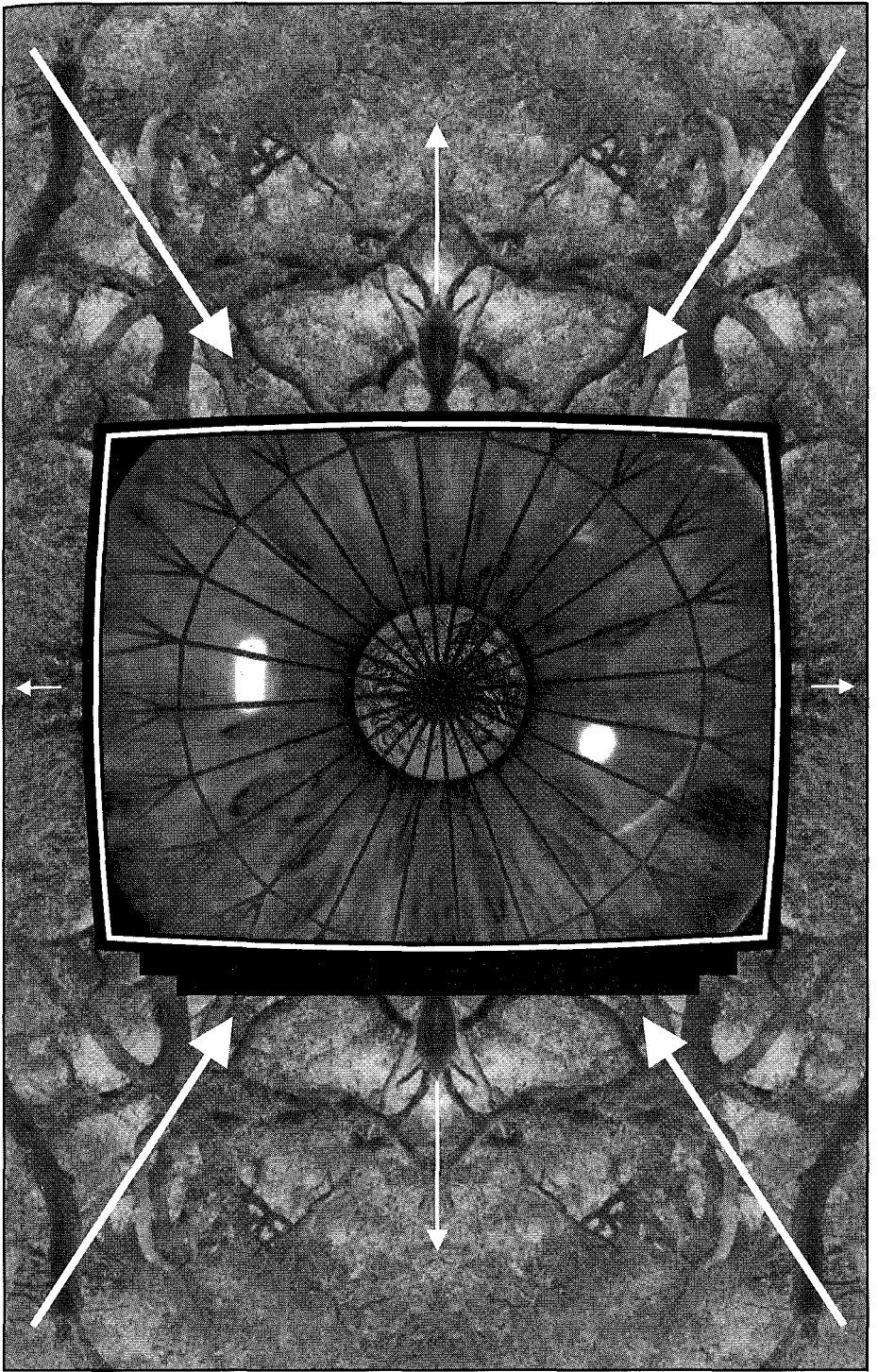
SCRAPED

HE ASKED ME IF I WANTED A “SCRAPED.” DELUSIONS OF MY hipness drained out of me. I thought I knew most of the slang my junior high kids were using but this was a new one. Did he just ask if I wanted to have sex? I turned to look at him. He was looking at me oddly with his arms up in front of his chest. Why was he looking at me like that? I looked down at myself. I had assumed the same pose. I must have unconsciously taken the “neutral/defensive, possibly offensive” stance I learned in self-defense class. The instructors said our combative learning will ingrain itself into something called muscle memory. I guess it worked.

He asked if I was okay. He dropped his arms to his sides. His demeanor showed me that he had no mal-intentions. With my arms still up I asked what a “scraped” was. He said that it was a shaved-ice treat, like snowcones. He pointed to the brown man coming toward us pushing a cart with a huge hunk of ice and syrup in dispenser bottles on it. The bells strung onto the handles jingled. He said his kids tell him that in Spanish this treat translates verbatim into English as “scraped.” I let down my guard, and my arms. I have seen these carts before in front of the school. I just never suspected such a question from him, today being his first day at work. I told him I would like one and we walked, sucking on sugar coated ice, to the adjacent teachers’ parking lot.

Yeah, that was a strange day. I sat at my desk, grading assignments. I was frustrated with the number of incorrect answers. Perhaps it wasn’t just the students’ fault. After all, I put off making the assignment until two a.m. the night before. I just didn’t feel like doing it any earlier. There could have been some ambiguous questions. Well, teachers have lives too.

Then I got caught up in watching John. He came out of his apartment downstairs. I turned back to my stack of papers. The penmanship on some of those!



But before I could even pick up where I left off, John came back. And then he was out again. I was distracted. A bad thing. But then maybe a good thing. I wanted it. A distraction.

Distraction is like diversion. In Spanish, they call diversion entertainment. So I was entertained by John. I watch him come and go. I watch him like a cat from my window. I am fascinated. He's tall, and I never suspected that he's balding. He walks as if sighing continuously but without the exaggerated chest movements. I couldn't help spying on him all afternoon. His apartment extruded him, sucked him in, expelled him, inhaled him. I was finally bored around six that evening.

On television, Phil, the liberal devil's advocate, was grilling underage young women about having anal sex with their boyfriends. One woman even confessed that she worries that she might be pregnant and might have an anal baby. Where does he get these people? But I am riveted. Only during commercials do I allow myself to take my ritualistic sojourns to the freezer. Now this is when the cheese falls out and breaks my toe. Well, it's been so hot this summer I even stopped wearing underwear. The elastic choked off my thighs into sausages, and I couldn't bear looking at them and fight off the heat at the same time. I could blame it on my mother. She's been feeding me cheese all my life. Cheese she gets from the government. Why does the government give out cheese? Mom still gets in line for the cheese even though she's been lactose intolerant for years. "It's mine," she says. "The government isn't going, to give me anything else so I'm getting what's mine." Well, what's hers is a distinct essence. You should see her freezer. It's loaded with cheese — all kinds. It's from her that I learned to store cheese in the freezer. Only I never expected the cheese to be a weapon.

So, I was at the emergency room for three hours last night. I wasn't a priority, they said. Finally, they looked at my foot, took X-rays, and told me that it'll heal itself. I waited all that time for nothing. They wouldn't even give me pain killers, because, they said, my broken toe didn't hurt. Can you believe that?

This is why, Mrs. Brown, I can't come in to work today. Would you call the sub desk?

SHARON BECKER

all stripped down

I've been dreaming of the truth
in bodies. The awkward glance
of fingertips, the slouch of reality
in the rockinghorse curve
of a relaxed spine. The blank trust
of a yawning belly button. Lately,
I've been dreaming of Gary Oldman.

In one — he chiseled stars
and ate them raw from hands
as thin and glinting as scissors.
He smiled at me, belly full,
his clean teeth spoke like street
lights: Stop. Caution. Go.
I smelled the palms of his hands — stars
smell like pennies hidden too long in a jar.

In another he was drunk, said nothing,
his cheeks bright and dancing with neon
medicine. He smoked solemnly, stroked
a hand over his thin English thigh.
Watching his wrists — I thought
I'd like to turn them over and bite
the thin skin underneath, plucking
veins like guitar strings with my teeth.

Last night, we swam in the pool
at my parents house and I thought
we were both 16. I turned on

the pool light — he kissed me,
his tongue plum candy in my mouth.
He raised his hands to my face,
on my shoulders his forearms
felt cool, slick as curving walrus tusks.

The truth is in bodies and I've
been dreaming of Gary Oldman.
All I know — his neck smelled
of tilled dark earth, his hip bone
jutting into the world with proud,
blind isolation. This is not a poem
about Gary Oldman, it is about
the dream of my body. The longing
for bones to show through skin
like glosses of fine wire.
The prayer for a belly as flat
and white as a sheet. To drink
whiskey with Irish despair —
to kiss a man whose face has grown
tight with desire and madness.

JIM STARK

Love is all Around

BILLY RAY CHARLES WAS NOT HAPPY. ALTHOUGH HE HAD A meal in his stomach and a roof over his head, he was not happy. In fact, Billy Ray Charles had seen much happier days in his life — days like the one on which he'd killed Earl Boggs, Jr.

But then, Earl had been asking for it. He'd made the mistake of pointing out that Billy Ray shared the same name as that blind, nigger piano player. In a magnanimous display of affection for his occasional drinking-and-puking buddy, Billy Ray shot him twice through the chest. Bang bang. What a mess that was. Billy Ray had been happy that day, but today he was not happy.

Perhaps it had something to do with the hat he was currently wearing. Only it wasn't exactly a hat. It was sort of a cap. No, it was more like a beanie. A metal beanie. Well, whatever it was, it was heavy and it made his scalp itch. It had been itching ever since they shaved it several hours ago. He would have scratched it if it weren't for the thick leather straps binding his arms and legs. In fact, when you got right down to it, the entire chair was awfully uncomfortable.

"A real ass grinder," Billy Ray might have said if compelled to speak, which he wasn't. The only thoughts occupying his mind at the moment were that his nose itched and that there was probably a Jew behind the one-way glass, hand on the switch.

Billy Ray scrunched up his haggard face under the maddening itch seizing his nose and a flashbulb exploded in his face. Upon seeing her son's scowling face peering up at her in the next day's newspaper, Billy Ray's mother would remark that her youngest son always was a "mean bastard," but that is neither here nor there. The photo would go on to win a Pulitzer Prize, however.

The facts of the matter were that Billy Ray Charles' nose itched, spots were



EMEK '93

dancing in front of his eyes, and his ass hurt. He opened his mouth to voice an opinion to that effect when his thoughts, confused as they were, shattered and disappeared in a riot of adrenaline inside his body.

Although Billy Ray was unaware of it, his bowels and bladder suddenly gave way in a colorful cascade of piss and shit. Had his neurons stopped ricocheting inside his skull for a moment, he would have been pleasantly grateful that it was someone else's job to clean up the floor, thankyouverymuch.

A spark suddenly appeared at Billy Ray's temple. Then another at his ankle. Tiny puffs of smoke squirted out from under the metal cap — beanie — whatever. Witnesses would later testify that Billy Ray appeared to be, well, cooking. In any event, at 11:04 a.m., the lightly smoking body of Billy Ray Charles was pronounced dead. Many of the assembled witnesses later confessed blackly that the more accurate phrase would have been "well-done." What a mess.

Across the room, Herb Schwartz was frowning.

"Oh, pickles," he said sourly.

He was not happy.

"Current cooks," Herb was explaining. "So it's essential that the system limit the amount of current at all times. Overload a person's body with current — say, more than six amps — and he'll cook like a chicken. Now I'm not saying he felt anything," Herb jerked his thumb toward the attendants scraping Billy Ray Charles' remains from the chair, "but for appearance's sake, it's not the best way to go — for you or the condemned. Have you ever seen a man overcooked? A man whose innards are so electrically scrambled his flesh falls off in your hands?"

He shivered melodramatically. "Brrrrrr!"

Sid Owens nodded attentively as he scribbled notes in his battered organizer. As warden of the Canyon Cove Correctional Institute for Men in Whitney, Colorado, Sid had finally received an appropriation from the state legislature to overhaul the Cove's execution system, and the mishap of Billy Ray Charles — the most recent in a long, sad comedy of public and publicized screw-ups — had convinced Sid that it was time to change.

"Two thousand volts is usually enough to stop a man's heart," Herb continued, his voice easing into the gentle rhythms of his practiced pitch. "Figure another 400 volts for the fat ones. Tack on an additional 240 to compensate for any voltage loss during the actual execution, and you've got 2,640 volts, which, in my opinion, is the ideal number of volts needed to electrocute a prisoner without causing any unnecessary trauma to the body."

Sid nodded some more and continued scribbling.

"Now then, I've been working on some special modifications which may interest you," Herb said. "You know those awful leather restraints?"

Sid's head registered a barely perceptible nod. He had a report to make to the corrections board, and he wasn't going to blow it by missing anything in Herb's presentation.

"They're great at keeping an inmate in the chair, sure, but they're a real pain in the ass when trying to get them out. I mean, take the case of that poor schmuck. You've got two hundred pounds of smoking, shit-smearred meat, and you want to get it out of there in a hurry, right? Well, I've been experimenting with seatbelts like the kind they've got on airplanes. Nylon, with quick-release latches. That way, you can have the guy on the way to the morgue in far less time. And hey, nylon is washable, you know what I mean?"

Sid's head bobbed appreciatively.

Herb was hunched over the Cove's electric chair, a salted drop of sweat hanging from his nose. The chair was partially dismantled, pieces strewn about the empty room along with the disgorged contents of Herb's many tool and electrical kits. Brightly colored lengths of electrical wire stretched across the floor in all directions like a spaghetti rainbow. A small portable television set flickered a few feet away.

Sid had managed to procure five thousand dollars for repairs to the Cove's electrical chair, and had hired Herb J. Schwartz & Associates, Inc. ("Execution Equipment and Support," his card read) to handle the job. Except Herb was, by all appearances, a one-man operation, so Sid couldn't figure out who the "associates" were. Probably some kind of tax write-off, he assumed. The scheduled execution of Vern Faubus was to take place in three weeks and Sid needed a flawless display of Capital Punishment At Work if he was going to get any more money for additional prison projects like the rec-room and gym. No more screw-ups.

As he made his way down the bland institutional sterility of the prison's hallways on his way to the execution chamber, the odd, lilting strains of Herb's voice wafted through the cement corridor.

How will you make it on your own

This world is awfully big

Girl, this time you're all alone

But it's time you started living

Time you let someone else do some giving —

Herb's voice broke off abruptly as Sid strode into the room.

"Hiya, Sid. How's it look?"

"Er, fine. Are you still on schedule for the Faubus date?"

Herb looked briefly hurt.

"Sir, you wound me! I'm making some minor modifications to be sure, but you have my word that this delicate piece of machinery will be fully opera-

tional in time for Mr. Faubus.”

Sid heaved a nervous sigh and slid an antacid into his mouth. It made him edgy when Herb spoke so pretentiously.

“Good, good.” A pause. “What kind of modifications?”

“Well,” Herb began, his features beaming with enthusiasm, “we both agree that ol’ Sparky here needs a new wiring job. But — his finger stabbed the air — you might not be aware that this backrest is terribly uncomfortable, if I may say so, and after that unpleasantness with Mr. Charles, I think it would be wise to install a drip pan underneath, to catch any ...”

He frowned, searching for the right word.

“Waste products,” he said at last.

Sid rubbed his chin, as he often did in moments of reflection, such as this one.

“Uh ... okay. Go ahead. Nothing fancy, just enough to get the job done. We gotta stay within the budget, remember?”

“Yes, yes,” Herb said impatiently. “Say, Sid, did you have a chance to think about what I asked you?” Herb nodded at the TV set.

Puzzled, Sid rubbed his chin harder.

“Oh. Yeah. I don’t think the Partridge Family played their own instruments. The Monkees, either.”

Herb thought about this.

“Damn. I thought so, too. I guess I’ve just been afraid to admit it.”

Sid gave Herb a worried look. The kind of look your mother would give you if you had a temperature — say, 100 degrees.

“Well, uh, just hang in there, buddy.” He paused. The silence stretched out uncomfortably.

“Uh, listen, I gotta get back to the office. Paperwork.” Sid turned to leave.

“Hey, tell me something,” Herb said.

Sid stopped mid-stride and raised his eyebrows.

“How can they call it ‘fancy ketchup’ when it comes in those little plastic packets?” Herb asked. “What’s fancy about that? Is it the same stuff they use in restaurants or something?”

Sid’s look became even more worried. 101 degrees with a rash, let’s say. Herb continued.

“And which is it — ketchup or catsup? Are we talking about different recipes? You know, the government oughta step in and decide once and for all. No, wait, the people oughta decide. We should vote on it and then stick to it.” He paused, thinking.

“Hey, you know people in the government. Maybe you can get this thing started,” he gushed.

“Gosh, Herb, I guess I never really thought about it,” Sid said carefully

while trying to regain his composure. "I'll, uh, I'll make some calls and see what I can do. How's that?"

"Well ... all right." Herb gave Sid a dejected glance and then returned to his task. Sid strode out of the room. Quickly.

Vern Faubus' Big Day arrived. On most people's Big Days, they'd dress up in something nice like a suit. Vern, however, had to content himself with the standard prison blues. Prison blues. Now there's a funny phrase.

Got them ol' prison blues

Got them mean ol' prison blues

Gonna fry in the electric chair today

Lord, I got the blues

Vern Faubus had been an eccentric fixture at the Cove for nearly 12 years, having been convicted of the rape and murder of two student nurses who had the sorry luck of sleeping with their windows unlocked one warm May night.

Vern had loudly proclaimed his innocence during his stay in Colorado's concrete Hilton, maintaining that he'd been framed by a nebulous organization known simply as "the Association." When confronted with the niggling evidence of a pair of bloody panties found in Vern's shitpile pickup truck, he declared that Colorado's Finest were not above planting evidence on an "undesirable," in Vern's words, which was unusual, since Vern's words were generally of the two-or three-syllable variety.

So despite the well-intentioned explanations of his innocence, Vern was sentenced to die. Do Not Pass Go, Do Not Collect \$200, Go Directly to Ol' Sparky. Unbeknownst to Vern was that he was to be the first test-pilot on the Cove's New and Improved electric chair, courtesy of Herb J. Schwartz & Associates, Inc. and a few thousand dollars of the state's money.

Vern had to admit the chair was more comfy than he'd expected. A padded seat and a backrest with a slight arch. He was melancholy for the loss of his hair, though — a luxurious black mane he dutifully combed every morning. After much protestation, he was allowed to keep his second most prized possession, however — his nattily-trimmed beard. So there sat Vern in The Chair and atop his bald, slightly misshapen scalp, sat the metal beanie, under which a large electrode was fastened to Vern's mostly empty head.

Reporters, relatives and other members of the prison proletariat milled about the room excitedly. Vern's mother was inspired to announce how "regal" her son looked, in spite of his bald head and the fact that electrodes were clamped to his ankles and temples. Cinched across his midriff, however, was a brand-new nylon seat-belt, courtesy of an obscure, bankrupt American airline.

Sid paced nervously back and forth, chewing an antacid. Herb, wearing a wide smile, reclined comfortably in one of the chamber's viewing chairs, con-

tentedly humming the “Jeopardy” theme as the minutes ticked by. He had thoughtfully brought along a stack of Herb J. Schwartz & Associates, Inc. brochures, in case anyone asked.

As the Big Moment approached, Vern fidgeted in the chair, as though he had something on his mind, however unlikely the idea seemed. Sid solemnly asked him if he had any last words.

Vern cocked his head to one side and thought. It took him a minute, but eventually he was able to dredge something up from the folds of his gray matter.

“I didn’t do it,” he announced with a defiant nod of his head.

Sid rolled his eyes.

“And, oh yeah, go Broncos!” Vern added, smiling stupidly.

Sid glanced at the executioner’s booth and pulled an imaginary switch in the air.

A moment passed. Another.

A hum filled the room, and Vern’s previously broad smile slipped away as his nerves started a furious tango under his skin.

From across the room, Herb’s eyes widened.

Sid chewed another antacid.

Vern’s beard caught fire.

“Oh, pickles,” Herb exclaimed tiredly.

“JESUS H. CHRIST ON A POPSICLE STICK!” Sid shouted.

Vern burned.

Unfortunately, the Canyon Cove Correctional Institute for Men was ill-prepared to deal with the combustion of inmates, spontaneous or otherwise, which might go a great length in explaining why the flames on Vern’s face were put out with a fire extinguisher, much to the horror of the assembled crowd. In fact, Vern’s mother was forced to amend her “regal” remark, and instead was heard to exclaim, “Oh, I don’t like that one bit.”

Meanwhile, Sid was frantically ducking a phalanx of reporters, retreating down a corridor screeching “No comment! No comment!” to the advancing mutant horde. He could already feel the hard mahogany of the Colorado grand jury’s witness chair under his ass.

In the death chamber, two of the Cove’s execution attendants busied themselves with the removal of Vern Faubus’ foam-covered form. He was, mercifully, dead. As they worked, both men made mental notes to speak with the union rep in the morning. This shit definitely wasn’t in the job description.

Herb made some notes on a soiled electrical schematic and some puzzled looks on his face. He was not happy. Again.

“Okay, I think I figured it out,” he said. He was standing in front of Sid’s desk, upon which rested a plaque reading “Chief Screw,” which no one but Sid found very funny.

“This is not a problem. Definitely not a problem,” Herb said reassuringly.

“I think it’s these damn mail-order parts.” He held up a melted electrical resistor for Sid’s weary inspection.

“That does it for me. Back to Radio Shack for Herb J. Schwartz & Associates.”

Sid sighed. He was good at it. He looked at his desk calendar. Thrill-killer Chester Figowitz had an appointment with ol’ Sparky in six weeks. With a sheer force of will, Sid resisted the urge to reach for an antacid.

“Okay, listen,” he began. “I need the chair operational in five weeks, Herb. No screw-ups.” Sid rubbed his chin. It was one of those moments. “You would not believe the shitstorm that has come down since the Faubus incident. I, me personally, cannot afford another botched execution. I want to know you understand this. Do you understand this?”

Sid leaned forward, which was his way of emphasizing a point. He didn’t know if it worked or not, but figured what the hell.

“Oh, yeah. No problem. I’ve got the blueprint right here,” Herb beamed. He waved the tattered schematic in the general vicinity of Sid’s face. “I’ll need to make a trip to the Shack, but the whole project shouldn’t take more than a few weeks. Three, tops. Of course, you might want to replace some of the burned parts of the chair, and the parts damaged by the fire extinguisher.” Herb rocked back and forth on his heels.

“What? Oh. Yes. Yes, okay.” Sid felt the muscles criss-crossing his skull begin to tighten.

“Keep me posted,” he grunted, turning his attention to an ivory blizzard of paperwork on his desk.

Herb smiled, then turned to leave. He paused.

“Hey, do you believe in an afterlife?” he asked.

Sid blinked, surprised at the question.

“Yeah. Yeah, I do,” he said finally.

“What’s it like?” Herb pressed.

Sid frowned in a moment of philosophical contemplation. “Well, I’d like to think it’s like a huge library, the greatest library ever created, with beautiful furniture and decorations, lots of light and tranquility, and all around you are books about the universe — everything, past present and future,” he said. “The whole history of the world right there for you to browse through for eternity. Everything that has ever happened and everything that ever will, forever.” Sid was smiling.

“What about you?” he asked.

Herb snorted. "Well, hell, I was just hoping I'd still be able to catch ESPN. That's all I'd want."

"You don't say," Sid replied, suddenly feeling very tired.

"Didn't I? Just now?" Herb asked.

Time passed. Sid knew this was so because the gags on his "Far Side" desk calendar changed. Sid liked the ones with cows. Cows were good. Cows were funny. The ones with ducks weren't as funny, but they had their moments.

One afternoon, weeks before the Figowitz execution, and against most of his instincts, Sid picked up the day's third cup of coffee and decided to check on Herb's progress.

He found Herb underneath the chair, his head buried under the immense wooden seat which was now covered with an orange nylon cushion. Frayed electrical wires splayed out around Herb's supine form. He was singing, oblivious to Sid's presence.

Love is all around, no need to waste it

You could have the town, why don't you take it

You might just make it after all

You might just make it after alllll

Sid cleared his throat. It had been sore for a while.

"Oh, hey. How's it going?" he shouted amiably.

Herb's muffled greeting drifted up from the floor.

Curious, Sid crouched down to see beneath the chair, tilting his styrofoam cup inadvertently. A thin stream of java spilled to the floor, spattering on the wires.

A spark burst above the puddle with an angry pop. Then another. Another. Suddenly, a spectacular chorus of sparks exploded like fireworks in the stillness of the room.

Under the chair, Herb grimaced as a deadly wallop of current surged down his spine. His legs stiffened, then jittered madly, the heels of his loafers tap-tap-tapping on the concrete floor in time to an insane, private rhythm.

"Oh, pickles," he groaned through gritted teeth, though Sid, his mouth agape, could not hear.

The room lights went out with a loud *tink!* Herb's legs ceased their electric boogaloo and lay still. An odd smell hung in the air. It was faintly like fried chicken.

It occurred to Sid then that perhaps Chester Figowitz would have to wait.

Herb J. Schwartz & Associates, Inc. landed in bankruptcy court soon after. No associates were ever located.

Herb Schwartz was not happy. He was dead.

ROLIN JONES

— I - 5 —
TRIPTYCH

1.

The girl
carves a
lazy face
in the
tree
and
waits
with the
sharp knife
for eyes
to blink.

2.

He's been a blue sky idiot
all during the day, but
thumbing for a ride at
this hour has him dragging.
The last car he saw he thought
was pulling over for him.
But the God damn driver is
probably home by now, sleeping.
He's waiting for the clouds to send
some stray voltage down his way,
high-fiving each telephone pole
as they hum with static whispering.

3.

“She sleeps with her mouth open in a car with bad shocks, dumb to the world” he says to the hitchhiker on the right. She has been sleeping for about an hour so he has taken over navigation for the meantime, which means turning on the car light with his right hand while steering with his left hand, and he really hasn’t the motor skills lately to do all these things. She had suggested taking the trip and he had to juggle a few appointments, but here they were, on the road to Ashland — “Which would be so good for us” he says, stretching to kiss her on the forehead. He wonders if she is dreaming, if she is dreaming about him. He has been wanting to talk to her for a while, and this will be a good time to talk. He doesn’t want her to dream about him. And he is very surprised of himself when later, she wakes up with the taste of the world in her mouth and tells him the turning signal is blinking.

CHRISTOPHER JUNG

SKIN DEEP

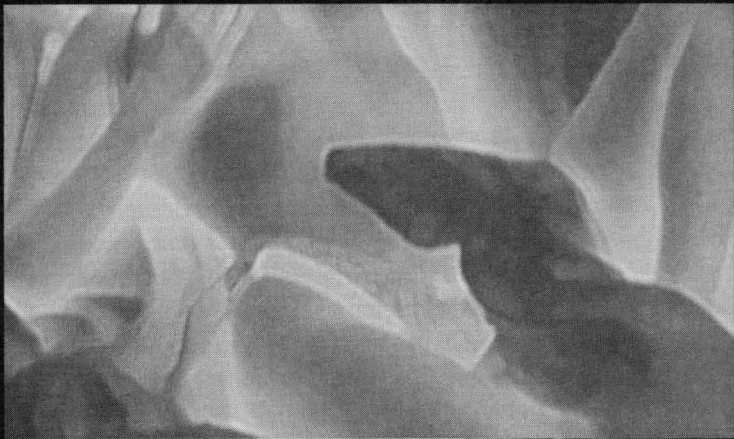
JULIET JOHANSON WHOLEHEARTEDLY BELIEVED THAT A penny saved was a penny earned. But if asked to elaborate, she'd add: *until you have enough for a down payment.* Such was the case with the automobile she now piloted, a 1994 Lexus.

Juliet navigated her car carefully, though the action was futile in light of the advanced decay of the freeway. No amount of caution could adequately protect a car's suspension from the hazards of the Los Angeles freeway system. Temporary freeways in constant need of repair provided the wear-and-tear that was the lifeblood of the Mr. Goodwrenchs of America.

Her new car battled admirably. She passed an older Ford Escort obviously not equipped with the same computer controlled four-wheel independent suspension as her shiny new Lexus. The balding man driving looked as if he were being shaken about like a bug in a masochistic five year-old's jar. She tilted her head slightly to the right, just enough to afford him a glance. When their eyes met, his mouth fell open, and his car skittered off into the guardrail. Juliet Johanson caused many men to skitter off into guardrails. She was an *exceptionally beautiful* female.

"What time do we shoot?" Frederick Clarkson asked. He was damned nervous. Though he was a professional with more than fifty films to his credit, he had never worked with a star of Juliet Johanson's caliber.

"Lighten up Freddy, whenever she gets here," Doc Fanelli answered. He wasn't a real doctor in the M.D. sense. The crew had given him the moniker in light of his ability to *fix* things. Doc liked it because of its prestigious sound. Sometimes he called himself the *doctor of love*. "Just hang loose, buddy boy. Want a Valium?"



"I can't perform on drugs. You know that. I can't hit my peaks with junk rollin' around in my veins."

"Right ... right. That clean living Betty Ford Center crap," Doc said, lighting up a Camel.

Frederick took offence to his crack. Not just anyone could get into the Betty Ford Center. He was proud of the fact that he could both afford it, and had enough public visibility to be accepted. But even that achievement didn't waylay his fears of working with the infamous Juliet. "Call's at one. She'll get here early for makeup and a read through right?" he asked Doc.

Doc chuckled for a moment, rearranging sixty years of phlegm building up in his throat. "Juliet doesn't do makeup or rehearsals. When she gets here, we roll. Got it? Oh ... and remember, only one take."

"One take! How do you figure? What if something goes bad? I drop a line, miss a cue or something."

"I'll get Nicki to catch it in editing, or we'll dub it."

"Do we dub daily, or after we wrap the shoot?"

"Not *we* Freddy, *you*. Juliet doesn't do —"

"— dubbing," Frederick interrupted, finishing Doc's sentence.

"Don't get smart buck. There's a hundred other guys just an ad in Variety away that would give their left nut just to stand within twenty feet of her, let alone *perform* with her," Doc said, adopting a ravenous tone that made Frederick suddenly believe the stories he'd heard around town. "If you *really* want to go over your lines, I'm game. It's twelve now. We got an hour."

Frederick smiled and picked two copies of the script laying on a table. He tossed one to Doc. "Are you here alone?" he asked Doc.

"Yeah, I'm alone."

"Well I'm alone, and you're alone. Whadaya say we go to my place and not be so alone together."

Juliet maneuvered her automobile with the skill and precision of an Indy driver. She popped the latest Sidney Sheldon novel in the tape deck and listened intently. The voice of Ed Asner, in rich Bose sound, filled the car with the smooth coupling of adverbs. A good book before an important shoot was a necessity for placing herself in the proper mind-set. Jackie Collins, Danielle Steele or V.C. Andrews were all pretty damn good, but none could hold a verbal candle to the master of the game, Sidney Sheldon.

She removed her brassiere, slowly, methodically, and pulled him against her aching chest passionately, tenderly. The words soothed her mind. It was almost as if Ed wasn't the fat guy on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, but rather the soft, gentle, whispering Michael, of *Thirtysomething*.

The words lulled her into thoughts about the life she'd never have with her

fame. Being instantly recognizable, she'd given up hope of ever leading a *normal* life: a simple house, a loving husband, beautiful well-mannered children. And above all, making love with someone she actually cared about.

Trust was a commodity that extremely beautiful people lived without. Juliet, being a member of that small sect, was caught between what men *wanted*, and what men *said* they wanted. The only truly satisfying relationship she'd ever had was with a man named Bob who had no penis. A tragic result of an overzealous pet Doberman. He was kind, caring, and intelligent. Far more intelligent than she, but never condescended toward her. He had a knack for observing what people took for granted, and extracting some sort of universal truth from it. Some idea that never would have dawned on her alone.

"Do you realize that there's an untapped market for air," he asked one day as they were walking in a park, eating frozen yogurt, and acting trendy. Juliet wore a shapeless sundress, a kerchief over her head, and sunglasses. "I mean think about it. It used to be the greatest things in life were free, but now you have to stand in line to go to the bathroom in public. Or at the very least pay a quarter. Being charged for moving your bowels for Christ's sake."

Juliet smiled, cluing in to his line of reasoning. "I buy bottled water and pay to park my car wherever I go," she said expectantly.

"I already pay to keep the air in my apartment cool in the summer. And when the smog gets really bad, we're told to stay indoors. I think I see a trend."

"I guess we'll have the D.W.P.O. soon. Department of water, power and oxygen," Juliet said. They smiled at each other.

"Even sex costs money. Condoms are dammed expensive I hear."

"Fortunately that's an expense you don't have to worry about, huh?"

They both laughed. Bob squeezed her hand playfully and pushed his yogurt cone into her face leaving a large circular stamp of vanilla on her cheek. She jumped away from him and held up her own cone in defense, as if it were a knife. "Ok, smart-guy, this means war. Prepare to be polka-dotted with pistachio."

"Take your best shot homegirl," Bob said, dancing like a boxer.

They circled each another, each one stabbing the other with their cone while other parkgoers watched and pointed.

She never grew tired of his intelligence. He never grew tired of her interest.

As happy as thoughts of the past made her, she was always faced with the unfortunate ending which could never be altered by way of her hindsight: Bob was dead. He had been so for six long months. But the lump in her throat paid no mind to the facts. She drove a little slower.

"It's 1:15! Where is she? I thought she was a professional," Frederick whined. Truth be told, with each passing minute he could more readily visualize him-

self the hell out of this studio, and on his way to his other call at six.

“Look Buck, you’ve been paid for four hours work. That means your ass is mine until five,” Doc stated emphatically, “whether or not you work with *Juliet* isn’t the issue. I’ve got two actresses on call if she doesn’t show. Got it?”

The rest of the crew became was silent, watching, waiting to see if Doc would be challenged. To Frederick, Doc suddenly seemed much bigger than he had originally. “Yeah, I got it,” Frederick whispered.

“That’s more like it.” Doc smiled the wide smile of victory and gestured to a tall man with a paper-thin mustache wearing an Armani suit. “Nico, get Wendy Crawford on the horn. Tell her she’s got twenty minutes to get down here if she wants to be a star.”

Nico moved as if he’d been given a hotfoot. Doc turned his attention to Frederick, who was now calm and cool. Wendy Crawford was no stranger. “You know Wendy?” Doc asked.

“Yeah.”

“Good. She’ll be here in twenty or my name’s not Doc Fanelli.”

Juliet had slowed down considerably. The analog speedometer on the Lexus’ state-of-the-art instrumentation panel read 43 mph. She was reliving Bob’s last moments in her head, and angering anxious motorist traveling in her wake.

She had been at Bob’s last performance at *Medieval Times: Dinner and Tournament*. Bob was a one of the dueling knights that entertained diners who were both hungry, and longed for times-past filled with courage, chivalry, and the roguish spirit of castles and kings. And most importantly, were willing to shell out \$40 a throw for an incredible simulation. Juliet had finally acquiesced to Bob’s pleading. She attended Saturday, June 4th’s performance.

Bob was the Black Knight. Juliet sat in one of six sections that circled a large dirt-floored arena. Her section contained about forty other people all wearing complimentary black paper crowns, and waving complimentary black paper flags, indicating their allegiance to the Black Knight, to Bob.

When the Bob rode onto the field — the black section cheered. When Bob took his lance into his hands and prepared to joust — they roared. When he rode forward toward his opponent, the Yellow Knight — they screamed. And when the Yellow Knight (who had mistakenly picked up the wrong lance earlier) plunged nine feet of solid pine through the Black Knight’s make-shift armor, killing him instantly in an exhibition of unbridled carnage — they absolutely howled with excitement.

Juliet pushed her way through the livid fans, making her way to the arena floor where the puzzled looking Yellow Knight knelt, over Bob’s body, trying to figure where exactly to perform CPR on a chest that no longer existed. Juliet fell to her knees alongside them. She lifted Bob’s faceplate and gingerly placed

both of her hands on his still warm cheeks. She ran them slowly, deliberately, over his rough acne-scared skin as if she were a blind woman trying to sculpt an unseen face in her mind. Tears quietly came as she closed his eyes with her thumbs. Putting her head to his chest, she got blood in her hair. The audience gave it a standing ovation.

In the six months that followed, Juliet worked. The work numbed her mind to the grief. And soon, Bob was forgotten, relegated to the back-forty of her brain. Warm coals of memory smoldering quietly, that her thoughts, when idle, fanned into a raging fire.

The blast of a truck's horn broke her meditative spell. She looked to her right. A tow truck trawling a heavily damaged red Ford Escort had slowed, and was keeping pace alongside her. A balding man riding in the cab of the truck gazed at her though the truck's dirty window, smiling. He held up his hand and waved with only his pinky. Juliet goosed the accelerator and shot down the freeway in a blur of Japanese design.

Wendy Crawford was Frederick's ex-girlfriend. They had met while shooting a picture called *Swingtime*. A year of living together later, she decided that the best way to climb a few rungs on the ladder of success was to sleep with directors, producers, and even an occasional grip. It had ended badly: screaming accusations, things being broken for effect. Frederick left their apartment, got into his car, and repeatedly bashed his head into the steering wheel, ultimately rendering himself unconscious. Still slumped over the wheel the next morning in his assigned parking place, Wendy got into her own car parked alongside, and drove away.

He hadn't seen her since that night two months ago, but not because he hadn't tried. Wendy would have nothing to do with him. She moved away, unlisted her phone number, and never frequented any of her *known* hangouts — at least that's what the private investigator he had hired told him. "For all *inten-sive* purposes buddy, she's gone," the P.I. said.

But blazing torches are difficult to extinguish, and Frederick Clarkson didn't even make an effort to try. Rather, he worked, convinced himself that Wendy had only left the planet temporarily, and kept on working. Working required concentration. And concentration paid no mind when thoughts of love-lost raised their bothersome heads.

With the mention of Wendy's name any semblance of concentration scattered like bandits from a burglar alarm. Now he would have the opportunity to confront her, start anew, patch it up and begin again. He began going over the one hundred-plus apologies he had been preparing for two months, rehearsing with mental images.

Nico walked onto the set and over to Doc, who was sitting in his director's

chair filing his nails. "Sorry Boss, Crawford's on another shoot. She said give her an hour."

"An hour," Doc said with an underlying torque that made Nico's bones quiver slightly. "And what do you suppose I should do with this hour she has so graciously granted me, watch the teamsters over there eat *more* sandwiches?"

Nico began to formulate an answer in the form of a shrug when, as if on cue, Juliet Johanson walked through the soundstage door.

II

Beauty is said to be in the eye of the beholder. When Frederick Clarkson was growing up, he thought this to be simply a defense in order to rationalize butt-ugly girlfriends or boyfriends. Maturity had reformulated the definition. He now knew the expression for what it was: *there are many ways to perceive beauty, and not everyone sees it in the same way.*

But judging by the slack-jawed expressions of the entire cast and crew occupying studio 26, on the *Expression Films* lot, these beholder's were all gazing at the image of Juliet Johanson through the same pair of eyes.

Frederick watched as Juliet strolled onto the set toward a dressing room bearing her name, marked with a star. He watched her calves flex tightly with each step of her bright red pumps. The swishing sound of leather on leather seemed to be the only sound in the studio as the rest of the crew, men and women alike, stared quietly until her leather clad form shut the dressing room door behind her.

"Ok people, you know the system," Doc Fanelli instructed through a bullhorn, "set up the bar scene. And remember, this is a closed set, and I mean closed. Only camera, lighting and sound aboard. Got it?"

A few groans answered, but did as they were told.

"Freddy, why don't you get into wardrobe. I'll come get you when we're ready," Doc said, looking somewhat concerned over Frederick's pallid complexion. "You want makeup? Mike'll take care it. You look like death. Remember, we're selling life here."

Frederick nodded and plundered off into his dressing room, Mike the makeup man in tow. Once inside he collapsed onto the leather couch, making the identical noise Juliet did earlier. That particular Pavlov's Bell added a third dip to his ice cream cone of fear.

"What's up Fred. You look yellow as a Chinaman," Mike said, "Christ, I'm not sure even *I* can bring you back from the dead."

"I'm gonna die. Oh my God. Did you see her Mike?" Fred asked, not really expecting any sort of confirmation. Mike was a raging homosexual.

“Damn straight. Even I’d be tempted to go back in the closet, change, and come out for that.”

Frederick’s spine telescoped upon itself. He slumped deeper into the couch. His backbone wasn’t the only part of his anatomy to go limp.

Juliet entered her dressing room and surveyed it quietly. It was more or less identical to the hundreds of other dressing rooms she had had at her disposal over the course of her career: a couch, a chair, and a dressing table.

Resting on the chair was her outfit for today’s shoot: a black spandex mini-skirt, matching tube-top, and a black pair of pumps not unlike the ones she was wearing. She removed her clothes and stood naked in front of the full-length mirror mounted on the wall, admiring, for a moment, the bikini wax she’d had earlier in the day. During the time with Bob, she stopped having it done, and now was just growing accustomed to its precision.

“Why do you have that done all the time?” he had asked.

“It’s in my contract. They want me to look good when I do nude scenes.”

“They know how a women should look naked?”

“They know what the public wants. They do market research.”

“Really? *Excuse me sir, just how important to you is neat and orderly pubic hair?* When was the last time you heard of a man having his body hair sculpted in the shape of a heart? It just seems silly.”

She stopped having it done, and asked to have any future clauses in her contracts demanding it abolished. She lost no work over, what the producers called behind her back, the *bitch’s kink*. This small pronouncement gave her an huge boost of confidence in her ability to guide her own life. But then Bob died. The salon called and asked why she hadn’t been around lately. She found she couldn’t remember why it was such a big deal after all. So she went.

Frederick was changing into costume when Doc Fanelli knocked on the door. “Come in,” he said, buttoning the fly on his 501s. He did this cautiously, as not to awkwardly pinch his penis in the process. He wore no underwear.

“You ready? Sweet Mike said you were a little shaky,” Doc asked, obviously enjoying Frederick’s predicament.

“I was born ready,” Frederick said, with a confidence entirely not his own.

“Ok Buck, take your mark. I’ll get her ladyship.”

Frederick walked onto the set and took his place at the ersatz bar once used, he had heard, on an episode of *T.J. Hooker*. Some of the other bar-going extras mingled with one another waiting for the shoot to begin. Frederick sat on a barstool, stealing occasional glances toward Juliet’s dressing room, trying to look calm, cool and bored. *Because when you’re cool*, Calvin told Hobbes in

last Sunday's comics, *the world bores you*.

Doc knocked, waited a couple of seconds, and walked into Juliet's dressing room. After a minute or two they both came out. Juliet strolled graceful as a gazelle. As she approached he remembered an article he'd read while waiting for the dentist to cap his teeth. It was in *Woman's Day* magazine. It was written by an ardent feminist named Sam Marshal. Frederick had to look twice at the writer's photo before realizing it was a woman at all, rather than an army drill sergeant. She had written that the much sought after "hour-glass figure," desired by men over the years was a myth. Frederick wished ol' Sam Marshal was alongside him now witnessing the exception to the rule sauntering toward him in *come-fuck-me* pumps.

"Yo buck, wake up," Doc said, waving his hands in front of Frederick trying to break whatever spell Juliet had inadvertently cast.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm ok. I'm ready Freddy. Heh ... heh."

Juliet stood looking bored, making Frederick's earlier attempt at the same action pale miserably by comparison.

"Ok it's gonna go like this," Doc said, "Juliet didn't get the chance to read though the script, so were gonna *improvise*. Were dropping sound, so you sound guys can split." He gestured to the sound men who looked very disappointed over missing the shoot. "So if everybody's ready, we'll get this rollin' like an *O*." Looking around, he noted the thumbs-up's from the crew. He whispered to Juliet and Frederick, "Are you kids all set?"

Frederick nodded dully.

"Yes," Juliet said in a deep breathy whisper that seemed to drain all the oxygen from Frederick's lungs.

Doc picked up the bullhorn and gave his direction: "Roll camera ... and action. Okay kids, you've just met, and you really like each other. Now Freddy, take both her hands and lean forward and kiss her. SLOWLY, slowly. Yeah that's it. Keep kissing, deep tongue now ... deep tongue. Juliet, release his hands and put your arms around his neck. That it ... that's it. Freddy, reach down and lift her skirt ... SLOWLY DAMMIT, SLOWLY. Run your hands over her tush. Nice ... Nice. Pull her toward you. I want some pelvis action ... little circles. Okay, now faster. That's it. FREDDY, LOOSEN UP FOR GOD'S SAKE! Okay Freddy, reach up and run your hands through her hair. Now push her slowly to her knees. Right, right ... you got it. Unbutton the fly Juliet ... lower the jeans. Stroke him first Julie. Just like that ... just like that. Let's have some mouth action now. FREDERICK LOOK EXCITED, THIS IS NOT YOUR MOTHER HERE. Ok, keep it up ... keep it up. Come on Frederick, how long will this take? Juliet take off the tube top so he can see your tits ... all right get back at it ... do it faster for Christ's sake ... come on Freddy boy what's it take a *Hover canister vac*? FUCK. CUT, CUT, CUT!"

Juliet stood but made no effort to get dressed. Frederick smiled at her weakly and pulled up his jeans. He knew what was coming from Doc, and he decided he'd feel less vulnerable with his pants up.

"Do you want to explain what's going on here?" he asked, again adopting that menacing tone of industry folklore.

"I'm just a little nervous. I've never worked with her before."

"And you call yourself a professional," Doc said disgustedly. "Look, why don't the both of you take fifteen and get to know each other in my office, if you know what I mean. When you get back, I want some steam. You got me Buck?"

"Yeah," Frederick said quietly.

Juliet looked even more bored as they headed toward Doc's office. "Could you please put your clothes back on?" Frederick asked Juliet, shutting the door behind them.

"That sort of defeats the purpose now doesn't it?"

"Just for a sec, I promise."

Juliet dressed and slumped down on the single item of furniture in the room, a leopard print couch. "Are you gay?" she asked, "is that what it is?"

"I don't think so. Though I've never really been seriously propositioned," he said, "but if Johnny Depp walked through that door, I might give it some thought."

Juliet laughed — genuinely. "Seriously?"

"I don't know. He's pretty damn sexy though."

"That's amazing. Everyone I meet in this business is a homophobic cretin "I think I sort of like you."

"Thanks. So ... ah ... what's a nice girl like you doing in a business like this," Frederick said in as swarthy a tone as he could manage.

Juliet giggled. "It pays the bills. Heck, it pays a *lot* of bills. I just sort of got swept away in it. The money grabbed me and I could never really get loose."

"Once you get used to the *things* this kind of money can buy, it's hard to imagine life without them," he said.

They looked at each another. Frederick smiled. It was returned. And for the first time in a long time, the respective memories of Bob and Wendy dimmed, and were replaced with possibilities.

"Do you think you might ..." Frederick asked, "... maybe, or not, but ... want to ..."

But before he could finish, Doc flung open the door and stormed into the room. "Are — we — ready — yet?" he asked, deliberately syncopating each word for effect.

"I don't know Doc, I still feel a little ... well ... soft."

Doc closed his eyes and mentally counted to three. "Would you like some

help? I'll send in a fluff girl, if you think it would help."

Frederick looked to Juliet who sighed, shrugged her shoulders, and left the office. "Fine, I'll try," he said.

Doc put his head outside the door and yelled, "NICO, SEND HER IN." He redirected his attention to Frederick, "you've got ten minutes. Then you better come out here waving that ivory wand of yours at full mast. Got it?" Without waiting for an answer, Doc turned on a dime and marched out. Within seconds his form was replaced by one very familiar. Wendy Crawford stood stoically in the doorway.

III

It is said that absence makes the heart grow fonder. Up until his conversation with Juliet, Frederick Clarkson believed this religiously. He believed it to be both true of himself, and of one Wendy Crawford. He entertained daily fantasies that, if they ever met again, she would be so filled with this fondness she would melt into his arms. The problems of yesterday falling away like so much flaky, sunburned skin. But upon Wendy's entrance his first thought was not of how her body would feel pressed up against his, but rather, what he would say to Juliet after the shoot.

"Hi," Frederick said.

"Hello Frederick," Wendy answered.

The familiarity of the voice was like slipping into a warm bath. He was sure she must feel the same way. "How've you been?" he asked.

"Away."

"Other than that."

"Why would you even care after the way I left you. Just lying there out-cold in your car?"

"Because I still care," he said, "for some reason I still care about you."

Wendy was quiet for a moment. She smiled sweetly and whispered, "you really do, don't you?"

"Yeah, I do."

Wendy walked over to Frederick. The air was electric with sexual excitement. And without touching, Frederick felt the familiar fire in the furnace down below. Blue steel was forged, so strong a diamond couldn't scratch it.

Sex was something that had always come easily for them. Neither compromised their particular style. What one desired, the other had offered genuinely. From kissing, to oral, to the peculiarities of body-english — they had fit together like spoons. It was flawless, and it would have been flawless again, if Doc Fanelli hadn't burst through the office door.

"Are we ready yet?" he asked.

Startled, Wendy jumped back. Doc was given a clear view of Frederick,

whom Doc now saw, was *more* than ready. "Get your butt outside Freddy, and you ..." he gestured to Wendy, "can pick up your check next Thursday. Beat it."

They left the office. Frederick watched Wendy's bottom sway as she walked away. He wondered how much more blood his body could direct from his brain to his groin before he passed out. He already felt light-headed as it was. He shifted his vision to the bar. Juliet stood against it in all her natural splendor. The crew and the extras were all gathered around her, also admiring that splendor. His head stopped swimming, and his thoughts became solid. Blood had once again been re-routed. He'd lost his erection.

Panicked, he looked back at Wendy walking toward the soundstage door. Almost instantly, he rose like a helium filled balloon. But as soon as he shifted his gaze, Juliet's sharp detail popped his manhood.

Doc and the crew watched Frederick's head swing back and forth between the two women. It was as if Frederick was watching a really good tennis match. There was more head movement down below. The action in his pants was startling. In less than a minute, Frederick's eyes rolled back into his head. His bones became mush, and he slumped to the floor. He passed out cold.

IV

Drink lots of liquid and get plenty of bed-rest, is commonly prescribed for treatment of a cold. It's the best advice anyone can offer because there is no cure for the common cold. Although he wasn't physically sick, this age-old remedy did provide Frederick Clarkson with a cure in the form of tranquility. When he came to, his mind was clear. He felt new.

Juliet sat alongside to him as he lay on the leopard skin couch. She held a wet washcloth to his forehead, and was gently running her hand through his hair. She smiled softly, and took his hand. "You okay?" she asked.

"I think so," he said weakly, "are we still shooting?"

"Everyone left hours ago."

"Was Doc mad?"

"He left, mumbling something about never working in this town again."

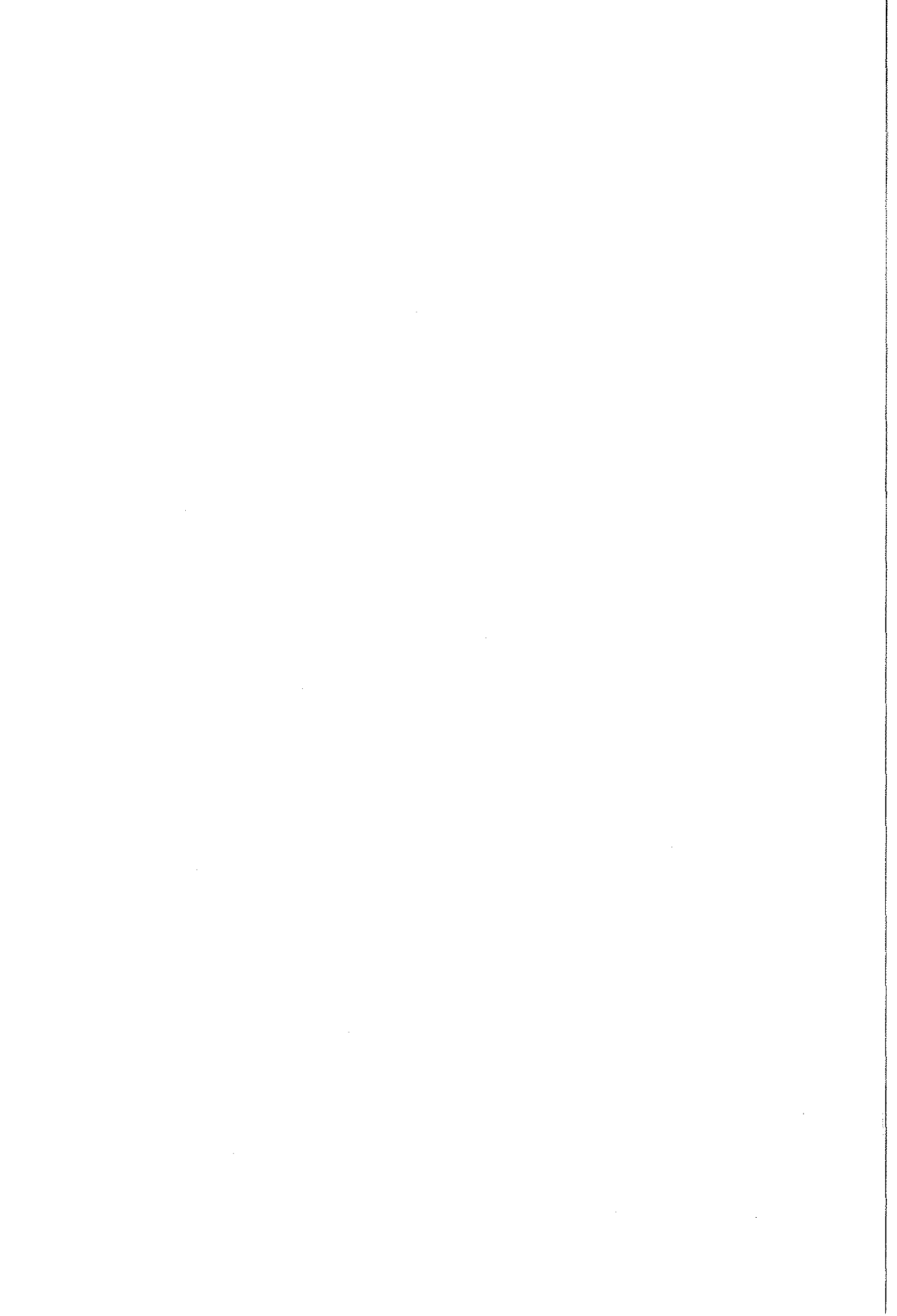
"Oh," Frederick said, not nearly as upset as he felt he should be.

"That girl Wendy is waiting outside for you."

Frederick's heart skipped like a stone on glassy water. But as soon as he looked at Juliet, he felt calm once again. "Do you think if we keep real quiet she'll go away?"

"I hope so."

"Me too."



PHOTOGRAPHY + ILLUSTRATION

Milky Consistency — **Diane Kai**
How it Really Happened — **Emek Golan**
Ordinary Men — **Chris Jurgenson**
The Princess Story — **Jennifer Fettelberg**
Winter — **Chris Jurgenson**
Him — **Chris Jurgenson**
Discharged — **Tom Moran**
Scraped — **Diane Kai**
Love is all Around — **Emek Golan**
Skin Deep — **Christopher Jung**

cover design & layout — **Diane Kai & Christopher Jung**
magazine design & layout — **Diane Kai & Christopher Jung**

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Sharon Becker was once called a "pretty tough chick" at a Soundgarden concert after punching a fellow music patron in the arm and drawing blood. She has also been involved in altercations at shows by: Rollins, Smithereens, Mudhoney, Mr. Bungle, Thelonus Monster, and Buck Pets. A midget once told her she was "very pretty" at a Pleasure Barons show in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She was flattered.

Jeannie Dolan was born in Ohio in 1964. She moved extensively around the country as a child and settled in Los Angeles in 1976. A graduate of CSUN's English department she has since involved herself in mountaineering, radio, and printing. Currently she is living in San Diego and working on her first novel.

Chip Erikson has been previously published in *Northridge Review*, as well as the magazine *Caffeine*. He dedicates the story *Him* to his mother Suzanne.

emek: short for the chemekal epidemek that spawned him, is a current artist in de Babylon System. for further information, please scan:



Jennifer Fettelberg: No life. No bio.

Rolin Jones, European-American, is currently on exchange at the University of Massachusetts in Amhurst. He got in a production of *The Crucible* and has no friends. He's embarrassingly good looking. Send correspondence and bits of erotica to: 134 Maplewood Circle, Amhurst MA, 01002.

Christopher Jung wishes they'd bring back Quisp.

Chris Jurgenson has lived and worked in the Los Angeles area for over 25 years. He holds a B.A. in photo design from CSUN and has traveled extensively throughout the world. His photography

has been seen in many galleries and exhibitions as well as in numerous magazines and books.

Diane Kai enjoys drawing stick people and stick bugs.

Gregory Lee Kinne is working toward making his life into an extended Dionysian ritual, broken up only by occasional periods of intense note-taking.

Amy M. Lam: Once upon a time, a long time ago, now, I say to you, come sit beside me, alongside be, listen to my pictures as I paint these words. You('re/r) hold(jing) me holding you, giving birth to ourselves, each other, simultaneously, repeatedly.

Damon Lewis: It's a great feeling to finally get this sad story published. Now when friends ask me about the scars on my wrists, I can tell them I was never suicidal and hand them a copy of the Fall 1993 Northridge Review. Fact of fiction? I'd call it decent prose.

Tom Moran believes very strongly in the Chinese proverb. His favorite f/stop is 16 and he has sold many more cameras than photographs.

Jana Myga (aka M.J. Pilatowicz) was born in Warsaw, Poland. English is her second language. She is a senior in CSUN's writing program and has been published in *Modern Poetics* and *Directions*.

After being rejected by *Northridge Review* four years in a row, **Colleen O'Mara** — a CSUN graduate — is now working as a writer/editor. She has just completed a video on multicultural education narrated by Maya Angelou, which she helped write and produce. Her sources of creative motivation include Sandra Cisneros, Louise Erdrich and Gore Vidal.

After graduating from CSUN with a degree in history, **Stacy Lynn Snyder** continues to write fiction, including, but not excluding *The Princess Story* and other demented fairy tales based in the same wooded area. She is also actively pursuing the publication of her latest novel *The Inner FAX*.

Timothy Schein has been put to sleep.

Jim Stark was a good kid from a good family. He now writes obituaries for a major metropolitan newspaper.

Tom Tapp is a senior in creative writing at CSUN. He wishes to thank the usual list of unusual suspects. They know who they are.

AWARDS

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

The **Northridge Review Fiction Award** recognizes excellence in short story writing by a CSUN student published in *Northridge Review*. The winner of this award receives seventy-five dollars.

The winner of this award for 1993 is Chip Erikson for *getting the hell out of reseda* published in the Spring 1993 issue. *Northridge Review* expresses its gratitude to Professor Gibson for evaluating the fiction.

The **Rachel Sherwood Award**, given in the memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes excellence in poetry writing by a CSUN student published in *Northridge Review*. The winner receives seventy-five dollars and will be acknowledged alongside the name of Rachel Sherwood.

The winner of this award for 1993 is Patrick McCord for *Paths* published in the Fall 1992 issue. *Northridge Review* expresses its gratitude to George Uba for evaluating the poetry.

SUBMISSIONS

Northridge Review accepts submissions throughout the year. For guidelines send a SASE to *Northridge Review*. To submit manuscripts and artwork directly, send to:

Northridge Review
CSUN English Department
California State University Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street M/C-ENG
Northridge, California 91330

Submissions without SASE cannot be returned.



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