THE GREAT LAKE REVIEW

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Volume IX

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(The inmates are running the asylum.)

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This magazine is made possible by funds provided by the Student Association of the State University of New York, College at Oswego.
the dream starts in April sometime
on a Friday in June I believe
the music comes in off an old
radio that was brand new this July
but that’s not the point
it’s the fantastic music
that nobody likes
and nobody hears
you see they are all with me
at the party
listening to a four man strings band
where all they played was sax
and their blues came out purple
I mean they were that good

yeah

but the pool looks nice
sitting next to the lake
and the darkness really set the mood for a swim
but nobody likes orange soda
so the band plays like lemon
it was really sweet the band you know
the four man strings band
that only played sax
and the radio still sounds
it’s got the beat
so I’m on tour and I’m the
world’s greatest radio player . . .

the party is over, some mess we made
the place was so neat
you wouldn’t believe that it belonged
to an Englishman who didn’t own anything
he believed in capitalism horatio alger
and his pet larry the barber from Kansas
who was a carpenter in Florida
this larry guy was also the leader of the
four man strings band that only played sax
and he lived in New York
you could tell he had blond hair
by the look in his eyes
so anyway I’m the world’s greatest radio player doing concerts in all the big cities after a while I found out that I was larry because our eyes were the same color and we both like the same fantastic color

so here I am larry and me doing my woodwork in Florida my band larry’s band I play all the time and I still make our blues sound purple we’re that good

yeah

J. Anthony Sheridan

Dutch Still Life

Such a vulgar flagrant mess of color!
I drink to blues, reds, yellows and whites together,
Long fine frail stems, oranges and pinks,
Varied and concentrate in time and light—
Drink most of all to the festival of insects,
Bees swimming in a paradise of stinks
And hues, while the wooden beatles climb
The long day long along the greens of time.

Roger Dickenson-Brown
Into the Rain

Last night Dianne called... and nobody answered the phone.

"You're closest," Mitch said, after it rang the third time. It rang a fourth and a fifth time and Mitch still sat at his desk staring into his book and I still lay on my bed reading a magazine.

"You get it," I said. "You can use the exercise."

"I'm busy," The phone stopped ringing.

"Told you to get it," Mitch said, still not turning his head from his book.

He turned a page and the phone started ringing again.

"I'll get it," he said, getting up.

"No, I will," I jumped up from my bed and tried to beat him to the phone. He grabbed my jersey and shoved me into my desk. Then he ran around me and picked up the phone.

"Joe's Mortuary," he said, almost before he had the phone off the hook, "You stab 'em, we'll slab 'em."

"Clever, Mitch," I said, picking up the books that I had knocked over.

"No, Dianne," "He's not here right now."

"I'm here Dianne," I yelled waiting for Mitch to hand me the phone.

"No, he just left with some chick," Mitch said, "She was beautiful too, Dianne. Blonde... a body that wouldn't quit... wild, voluptuous lips..."

I grabbed the phone from Mitch.

"And she didn't have any clothes on either, Dianne," Mitch yelled. I pushed him and he went back to his desk and book.

"Tell him he's wierd," Dianne said after I said hello.

"She says you're wierd, Mitch."

"Ah, she loves me," Mitch said.

"He says you love him," I told Dianne.

"He wishes."

"You wish," I said to Mitch.

He didn't answer and I didn't answer for him so Dianne started telling me about her philosophy final. She told me that her logic professor was the meanest, cruelest, human being in all of North America, and that no one understood the test.

"He told us that the quantitative theorem wouldn't be on the final," Dianne complained. "And there it is... The first question on Part II. I hate him, I really hate him!"

I told her that burning down his home or killing off his children might be a good way to get even with him. The idea of her professor's children lying dead in the streets calmed her. After a few minutes, she was able to change the subject.

She wanted to know what Mitch and I had been doing. I told her that I had been reading a magazine.

"Penthouse?" she asked.

"No," Psychology Today."

"He is not reading Psychology," Mitch yelled, turning around at his desk.

"It's Playboy, Dianne... PLAYBOY!"

"Hold on a second, Dianne," I said, "there's a fool in my room. I have to step outside." I walked out into the hall and closed the door on the phone chord. The phone wouldn't reach all the way out into the hall so I leaned my head on the door and my shoulder against the wall. When I looked down the hall, I saw about four other guys pressing their heads against their doors and holding apparently chordless telephones to their ears.

"What's Mitch Doing?" Dianne asked.

"Says he's studying," I said.

Then Dianne asked if we could break off from our work and come down to her room for a party with her and her roommate.

"Maria has a couple of bottles of wine," Dianne said "And it is our last night together before Christmas vacation... maybe our last night together, ever. We could have a going away party and a Christmas party all at once." I said okay and hung up the phone.

"Are we going down to Dianne's room?" Mitch asked, almost before I was back in the room.

"I am," I said "but you're too busy." I slid my magazine back under the mattress of my bed and pulled a clean shirt out of my dresser drawer. "You have to study," I said pulling off my jersey.

"No, I don't," Mitch said. "I just finished." He closed his book, jumped up from the desk and started combing his hair in the mirror.

"Why don't you stay here and write a letter to your mother or something?" I asked. I put on my clean shirt and sat down on my bed to put on my sneakers.

"I'm going home tomorrow morning," Mitch said as though I had really meant for him to write her. I'll talk to her then. It will save me the stamp." He put his comb back on his dresser and straightened his collar. "Let's go!"

He opened the door and stood in the hallway a minute, waiting for me to tie up my sneakers. Then he led the way down the hall to the stairs.

*D * * Dianne and Maria's room was two flights down from ours. Mitch swung around the railing on the landing and ran down the stairs ahead of me. He turned the corner at the bottom of the stairs, walked down the hall and knocked on the girl's door. I was just coming around the corner when he went inside. When I came up to the door, Dianne came running out of the room almost bumping into me.

"Maria packed her popcorn popper," she said running halfway down the hall. "I have to go borrow one." Dianne was pretty and her hair was long and brown and it waved behind her like a scarf when she ran. I still smelled her perfume when she was gone. I turned and walked into the room.

Inside, it was almost dark. The carpet and the beds and the posters on the
walls were brightened only by the red and green lights that glowed from a small Christmas tree under the window and two candles that burned on a small table in the middle of the room. Mitch was lying on Dianne's bed with his legs hanging off the end and his head propped up on a Winnie-the-Pooh bear. Maria was stapling left over Christmas tree garland to the edge of the table that held the candles.

Maria's hair was short and dark and it glowed in the light of the candles. She was from Richmond and her face never seemed to lose the tan that the Virginia sun had given it. She was pretty and her eyes shone, but she had a strange, uncertain smile that always made me feel as if I were someone she was afraid to talk to.

I said hello to her and told her that I hoped it wouldn't snow before her trip home. She just smiled as if she were afraid and said that it wouldn't matter once she was out of New York anyway. I agreed and then walked over to look at the Christmas tree.

"Make yourself right at home, Mitch," I said when I passed Dianne's bed. His hands were up behind his head so I slapped him on the chest and backed up before he could swing back.

"Dianne doesn't care if I lay on her bed," he said. He hit me in the back with Winnie-the-Pooh.

"And don't throw her animals around," I said. I looked at the lights and the tinsel on the Christmas tree and then sat down in the chair at Dianne's desk.

On the wall above the desk were two pictures of Dianne's boyfriend holding up some fish that he had caught one summer in Canada. Below the pictures of the fish was an 8" x 10" photograph of a sunrise over a beach in Massachusetts. I liked that picture, I decided, mostly because it was a sunrise instead of a sunset. I just looked at it and tried to imagine sitting on the beach at 5:30 in the morning, waiting for the sun to come up.

Just below the sunrise picture was a poem that Mitch had written early in the semester. He had asked Dianne to read it over to check the spelling and she had liked it enough to copy it and hang it on her wall. I was reading it and trying to decide if he had copied it out of a book or not, when Dianne came in.

"Mitch, get your feet off my bed!" she yelled. She closed the door behind her and set a popcorn popper down on the floor in front of the closet. She plugged in the popper and poured in some oil and popcorn while Maria set four wine glasses on the table around the candles.

"You guys are quiet tonight," Dianne said. "What's the matter?"

"I'm reading," I said.

She saw me reading Mitch's poem and started quoting the last two lines...

"Of this I am certain," she said. "The stars that shone for you and I, shall never shine again."

"Where'd you steal that poem from?" I asked Mitch.

"Didn't steal it," was all he said.

"Well it should be, 'sill never shine!'" I said. "Not 'shall never shine!'"

"Poetic justice," he said. "I can say 'shall' if I want to."

"It's license, Mitch," Dianne said. "Poetic license."

"I can say 'justice' if I want to," Mitch said. I wished I had learned the difference between license and justice but I wasn't quite sure so I turned around and started talking with Dianne. She was sitting on the floor leaning up against the closet doors, and we finished talking about our finals and about going home, and about Christmas.

She never really seemed to look straight at me, when I was talking, but just looked down at the floor, or at the pictures on her wall, or at the stripes on my shirt. And sometimes, I could forget anybody was listening and...
them at the ceiling.

"To a good semester," I said.

"And to glorious Long Island University," Mitch added. We all chugged our wine and Maria refilled the glasses as soon as they hit the table.

"You know," Mitch said, leaning back against Dianne's bed, "life is really just one long semester."

"Quite profound, Mitch," I said, "quite profound."

"Yup," he said. "It's just one long semester."

He never explained why he believed this, but the way he said it made me believe it too.

"To a good semester then," I said, holding up to my glass.

"To a good semester," Dianne repeated. We each drank another glass of wine. It was cold and strong and already I could feel it in my head.

We decided it was Maria's turn to make a toast so I refilled the glasses while she sat back and tried to think of something to say. She couldn't think of anything so we drank four more glasses of wine to a good semester.

"The cow's almost dry!" I said, holding up the wine bottle. Dianne stood up and walked across the room to get the other. Maria was still trying to finish her last glass, so I emptied the first bottle into Mitch's.

"Look everybody," Dianne said. She was leaning over the Christmas tree and looking out the window. "It's snowing!"

Maria and I stood up and walked over to the window. "Might have a white Christmas afterall," Maria said. She cupped her hand over the window to shade away the light. Then Mitch came over.

"That's not snow," he said, leaning closer to the tree. "It's rain."

"Is not," I said. "It's snow."

"Maybe it is rain," Dianne said quietly. She moved a little closer to me and Mitch looked over her shoulder so that it looked as though we were all huddled around the Christmas tree.

"In Massachusetts, it's snow," she said. Then we were all quiet. We just stood there, together, with the red and green Christmas tree lights blinking on and off in front of us.

In the window, I saw Maria's smile. I wanted to hold her and tell her that tomorrow I'd be gone and she wouldn't have to be afraid anymore. I saw Mitch and I wanted to tell him that it had been a good semester and that maybe we should all have another glass of wine. And I saw Dianne. But she just looked through our faces at the dull, dark, empty universe behind them. She put her arm around mine and her head on my shoulder and I knew she was crying.

"Well, we've still got a whole bottle of wine to kill," Mitch said. Dianne wiped her eyes with her sleeve and we all walked back and sat down around the table.

"I have a question," Mitch said, "For all you junior wino's of America, where..." he paused and held the wine bottle up to his mouth like a microphone. "Where were Ernest and Julio Gallo born?"

"I know, I know," Dianne yelled. Mitch held the microphone up to her mouth. "Wichita, Kansas!"

"No, you are incorrect," Mitch yelled. He shifted the microphone over to Maria.

"And now Ms. Maria," he said, "you can win seventeen million dollars, plus a brand new Pontiac, plus a free, all-expense-paid trip to fabulous Tahiti, if you can tell us where the Gallo's were born."

Maria wrung her fingers through her hair trying to think of the answer.

"If she gets it wrong," I yelled. "Can I try?"

"Shut up!" Mitch yelled back putting his hand over the microphone. "Nerds can't play. Quickly please," he said to Maria. "You have five seconds."

"I know," Dianne yelled. "I know, now!"

"I'm sorry," Mitch said. "Our time is up. But we've enjoyed having you on our show and we hope you've enjoyed being here."

"It's a crummy show!" I yelled. "And the announcer wears army boots!" I started throwing popcorn at Mitch.

"But don't forget, girls," he said, "you don't go home empty handed. Each of you wins, as a consolation prize, fourteen cases of Rice-A-Roni and three bags of JET Marshmallows!"

"I hate marshmallows," I yelled throwing more popcorn,

"You can keep your crummy marshmallows," Dianne said. "I wanted the seventeen million bucks."

"I wanted the car!" Maria said and she wasn't afraid to smile. "Give me the car or I'll steal your microphone!"

Then we all threw popcorn at each other. We drank the rest of the wine and, when it was gone, Mitch and I stood up to go home.

"Well," I said, "you guys can party all night but I have to get some sleep." I walked over to the door and stood there waiting for Mitch. He was standing by the table talking with Dianne about Tahiti. While they were talking, Maria came over and handed me a small piece of paper.

"Will you write?" she asked quietly.

"If I do," I asked "will you write back?" She stood there for a minute looking at the paper in my hands.

"You know," she started, "places can't be that hard to find..." She looked down at the floor. "And if I'm ever in New York again... or if you're ever in Virginia..."

"I'll write," I said. "And you be sure to write back."

"I will," she said. Then Mitch finished talking with Dianne. He thanked them for the wine and popcorn and agreed to stop down before he left. We both said goodbye and walked down the hall to the stairs.

Bob Miller
**Love Song**

I'm sitting on a sofa.
Looking at two rooms.
Outside the window in the other room,
It's so blue it's almost black.
I want my baby's back.

I'm walking down the stairs,
Looking at two doors.
One door is so closed
It's open just a crack.
The other door's so open,
I want my baby's back.

Down at the railroad yard,
Wading through the cinders.
I see two boys dressed in red and black.
They're putting shiny pennies
On the railroad track.
I want my baby's back.

I'm walking through an alley,
Looking at two cats.
One cat's so nervous,
It's ready to attack.
The other cat is hissing,
I want my baby's back.

**Goodchild: Another Rock 'n Roll Story**

It was Friday. I remember distinctly because the Christmas concert for the elderly was Friday, the Friday before the recess. Hundreds of old people with walkers and crutches shuffled into our high school. I was working sound with Eddy Polermo, a short dark Italian with thick hair. The old people kept to themselves and looked at the students running through the halls with pained expressions. It worried me, because I thought about growing old. That's what it's probably like, growing old, just living your whole life being careful and considering your responsibilities, and then, when you're too old and stupid to be of any use, they cart you away to some home. They have to, you know, because your kids can't afford etc., etc., co all your wisdom and experience just gets twisted and wasted. It's called senility.

I was talking about the "senile old bags" with Ed as we lay the microphone cables across the stage. Ed wasn't listening. He asked me to join his rock band. This is all he cared about. Ed was quiet, a man of few words. He was the drummer. He had seen me playing bass for the school orchestra and asked me if I had an electric guitar. I told him I did. He told me his band was playing a party Saturday night at Tim Mosca's house. Tim was the local stooge and dope fiend; every time his parents left home for the week-end, and they did that a lot, Tim would throw a party and his friends would destroy the place.

On Saturday night I arrived at Tim's basement door at 10:00. Inside, about 50 bored, shabbily dressed teenagers were flopped on sofas and pillows listening to loud amplified garbage coming from one corner of the room out of my field of vision.

I stepped into the smoke filled den, and in the far corner, standing in front of three small amplifiers was Ed's band: John Carroll, guitar; Horatio Polermo, guitar; and Ed, drums. They didn't need bass player; they needed a miracle. John was a chubby, about 6'3" with brown curly hair and a pug nose. When he played, his lower lip hung limp, like a scolded child. I thought, shit, he looks like a big baby. Horatio seemed to be in control. He was only 5'9" and 15 (John and Ed were 17.), but he had a mustache and the girls were crazy about him.

The music was blaring out the worst equipment I've ever seen in my life. It was shit. I couldn't make it out. Later someone said they were playing Beatles' tunes all night. I couldn't believe it.

I found my way over to the half keg against the wall. It was sweating all over the cement floor. I proceeded to get plastered. At the end of the night John came over and introduced himself. I don't remember any of the conversation, except that he seemed to be a nice guy, and kept apologizing about the way they sounded. I kept shaking his hand and telling him it was O.K., that I couldn't hear any of it anyway. I was faced. Somebody drove me home.

The following Monday, Ed walked in on a show I was doing for WWH, the
high school radio station. It was named after Walt Whitman and we used to say, "And here's Walt singing "Rape, Stab and Mutilate." We dedicate this tune to our loving principal, Mr. Wright." Then we'd play "Mother's Little Helper" by the Stones about pill popping.

Ed asked me if I could make a rehearsal at John's house that night. It wasn't at his house actually, it was in a trailer behind his house. John's parents ran a delicatessen on the turnpike and were really cleaning up. They used to own a trailer park, but got out of it a few years back so they could concentrate on the deli business. All that was left were these gutted trailers in a field behind their house. I think they set fire to them for the insurance, One was intact, however, and this is where the band, christened Goodchild by John, held its rehearsals.

We didn't say much. John talked the most, telling me the plans he had for the band was. We tore into Jumping Jack Flash and the rest of the band was ecstatic. They had never played with a bass before, and they were shocked at how it filled out the sound. I was in the band. I left, feeling I had made an impression.

After several weeks, John played a song he had written called "Scrambled Eggs"; Scrambled eggs are the first words Paul McCartney used to write "Yesterday." He woke up one morning, went to the piano, and sang "scrambled eggs, all my troubles seemed so far away la la la" and the rest is history.

John's song was about business men, and nurses and really just about everybody who "beat their kids and cry/ and they have nothing behind their eyes/ that's how it appears to me/ yes, that's the way it appears to me." John was hilarious.

It was a good song. I threw in my ideas. We spent all day working on it. On Saturday we rang up Ed and asked if he could get over to John's and work out the drums. I guess it was around this time that I had started spending more time at John's house.

Me best friend for the last fifteen years had moved to Florida the summer before, and I had been floating from group to group, for six months. I was glad hook up with John, and even better, have the group as the central bond in our friendship.

John's house was a square white building off the turnpike, but inside, there was thick paneling and deep shag carpet everywhere. The Cubbins' had a little black poodle named Bobo. John would pick it up and make it growl—vicious little fella.

John was strange. I thought, well, here's a decent guy and all, clean cut, a bit chubby, etc. But it turned out he could be a right bastard. I soon learned that he had been thrown out of St. Paul's, the expensive Catholic school, for spitting on a nun. He was crazy! He told me stories of times the P.A. system went on the fritz, and John would sit in back of class, put his hand over his mouth, and imitate a crackling speaker announcing "Sister Theresa, to the main office (click, static)."

There was a student with a port wine spot, a birthmark, covering one whole side of his face. John used to follow him around, and when he passed a group of girls, would call out "Hey Spot, here boy, here Spot!" The boy would tear after John crying and screaming, but he was a thin ugly guy and some of John's friends would trip him up and John could get away.

John was a panic.

This sense of black comedy permeated every aspect of his personality, especially with girls. He was nervous around girls, but also everybody, I guess, and he covered it up with his humor.

It soon became apparent that we were going to give up our lives for rock and roll. John started selling everything he owned to save up for a Gibson Les Paul. He sold everything I owned too.

It was about this time, late April of our respective senior years, John at Twin Oaks High (where he would continually lie on Cafeteria tables and tell people he had cancer) and I at good old W.W., that we started to wear suits and sneakers at our performances. We played at a free concert at the South Huntington Public Library's Annual Benefit for Handicapped Children wearing three piece suits and white Puma sneakers. People thought we were crazy. Ed and his brother Horatio, who was becoming a constant source of irritation (John said his looks were going and it was killing him, sort of like change of like in women), just hung out in back as John and I stayed downstage in front of the microphones. John would say, "Thank you. This'll get your pacemakers goin', kids. Jumpin' Jack Flash! All right! Just tap the sides of your wheelchairs on the offbeat, O.K.? Let's do it!"

Needless to say, we barely escaped with our lives that time.

Equipment was a constant source of interest—that is, how to attain it without spending money. John and I decided to steal from our high schools for whatever odds and ends that were needed. Our microphones, courtesy of Walt Whitman High, were of the finest quality.

John and I began to exchange confidences. It was 10:30 on a school night, and we pulled into the Bonanza parking lot in John's Cadillac. John liked big cars—his parents' Lincoln and Chrysler Imperials, which they rented from Mitchell's Cadillac. John lit up a cigarette and handed me the lighter for mine. We called them Boots. "Gimme a boot, John," I said, holding the lighter like an idiot.

"My father used to go crazy," he said, staring out the front window, staring intently, like it looked as if this really hurt him to part with this. "He beat my mother a lot. One night she came into my room crying and she said, 'Your father's killing me, John', and I said, 'Yeh, he's a sonofabitch' and she slapped me across the face and said 'Never say that about your father again!!' Can you
believe it? That's it man. Fuck me up once, and I never forget it. I just live in that house now. We're through."

John kept staring out the window. That was nothing compared to what went on in my house. My father was dying of cancer, but slowly, like for the last six years. I started to speak, but said, "Yeah, it's no picnic at my house either."

We talked a lot that night, but nothing too personal. Just opinions on girls and stuff. John thought all girls were sluts. I was more educated, having read a copy of Time magazine once, and realized that women were sluts too, but had to be convinced otherwise if you wanted to fuck them. I didn't tell John. We was lost in thought.

John didn't like to talk about himself much, though. He was starting to grow his hair, and it was growing wild, in a long mane spilling over the back of his neck down his back. I was trying to grow a beard with a vengeance. It was mangy and itched like hell.

John told me about his latest conquest. It was with Cheryl, a real slut, and it was hysterical. He was over at her house the night before, and after a couple of hours of bullshit, said, "Hey, wanna go upstairs and listen to records?" I woke up the next morning and thought, 'What the hell am I doing here?' he said, taking a drag. "Shit." He stared out the window. It started to rain.

Weekends we would sleep in the trailer and John would serve us breakfast in bed, throwing a pint of milk in our faces, and tossing a plate of English muffins and stuff. John thought all girls were sluts. I was more educated, having read a copy of Time magazine once, and realized that women were sluts too, but had to be convinced otherwise if you wanted to fuck them. I didn't tell John. We was lost in thought.

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The people in the shop were hysterical. Most were mechanics and salesmen, regulars during the week who'd stop into the shop weekends to talk about the game and who won and who was ahead in the standings. Some greasy drunk would stumble in and say, "Hey, did you see the game last week?" I woke up the next morning and thought, 'What the hell am I doing here?' he said, taking a drag. "Shit." He stared out the window. It started to rain.

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John said it was like this when you got old. "Look at the people who come into my shop," he said one afternoon when we were cleaning up. "You think they've learned anything? They've been alive twice as long as you and I, and what do they know? They're idiots. I spit on those people. They're worm salad."

One night when we had nothing to do, John and I decided to go into New York City and walk around. We took the 7:05 out of Huntington and arrived at Penn Station about an hour later. The whole trip we discussed some psychological gibberish about masturbation and the vagina as the most overrated and underrated of all the human organs. The only other passenger in the car was a drunk black in shabby clothes who stared at us and said, "Shoot!" every five minutes or so.

Later John said, "He just thinks we're two crazy white boys."

By August, we had moved all our equipment into Eddy's grandmother's house. She lived almost around the corner from John's place. She had a finished basement and went out every night, so we had a lot of practice time. We borrowed a four-track recorder from Eddy's friend Bob, a photography student at F.I.T.

Our plan was to get four songs on the tape and send it off to various promoters. It took two weeks to record it. We'd get the vocal track down and then decide to add harmonica or something, so we had to go back to the beginning. Every
track for every song took about a hundred takes. The songs were “Scrambled Eggs,” “Ballad for Frank Breslin,” “See Me Now,” and “Television.”

The two middle songs were written after one of John’s friends from St. Paul’s had died of leukemia. John was pissed off at the fact that none of the kids really cared about it. “See Me Now” was written as pure slog, something to fill in before the rocker, “Television.” “See Me Now,” however, turned out to be our best song. We always ended our second set with it. We sent the tape off to a Mr. Bass who liked what he heard, but wanted a lot of copy material. We figured we’d forget it. John was a diehard original’s man. Eddy, however, said this was the break the band was looking for. Horatio was leaning toward John and I was against going out on the road no matter what.

We left the basement, leaving Bass’ acceptance note and the tape lying on Ed’s snare drum. Upstairs was hot, and we moved outside. Ed’s grandmother had her driveway run adjacent to the side of the house. The moon was out, and the damaged backyard, one side framed with the back wall of an upholstery repair factory, danced with thrown shadows of the maple tree in the right corner, waving its tall branches as an Hawaiian dancer symbolized rain in the stiff breeze.

Ed looked up at the branches and sat down with his back against the beige tiles of the house, “Sometimes, I wake up in the morning (He had a summer job at an electronics company’s assembly line.) and think, I have to go to work, I have to get up every day and go to work.” He gazed up at the branches. “Horatio and I used to have a tree fort up there. We used to play in it every summer.”

“You know,” he said, changing the subject again, “I see these guys at work, and it’s like their married to their jobs. They have betting pools, and they argue about the supervisor and talk about quitting and going to Florida, but they never do anything. They never . . . do anything.”

Ed was a simple lad. John and I nodded to each other. Poor little Italian.

John once talked about Ed and his family; Ed’s father was a janitor, his wife a secretary at the junior high. It worried John, that these people would never be more than janitors. “You know what they do? Even when they answer the phone, they say, “Huh, what! Who? Uhh, yeh yeh, hold on.” Even Mrs. Polermo talks like that.” Their lives are over, even Ed’s.

John and I were standing at the far end of the driveway, toward the garage, and Ed’s body was silhouetted by the outside light.

“He looks pitiful, doesn’t he?” John said softly.

“Shut up, John. That’s your drummer.” I shook my head. “No sense of loyalty.”

“We’ll see where loyalty gets you, you asshole,” he said. We walked back to where Ed was sitting. Horatio was inside watching a movie on the cable channel.

John spoke. “We’re gonna write our stuff. I’ll call Bass in the morning and tell him it’s off.”

“John,” whined Ed, “When are we going to be asked to play the Northeast again?”

“As soon as I write more songs, you lazy bastard,” said John.

I hadn’t told them, but I had been accepted to Oneonta State College. I left a week later. They threw me out of the group, natch, but I’m majoring in broadcasting, so I still play rock and roll.

Osric N. Young
A Place

She cried because they left out the potatoes. At 200 pounds in her wheelchair—"They want me to starve," until the aide brought her something else to eat.

I worked in the coffee shop downtown," she said, munching her carrots, "Met a real nice guy there and married him. We went to all the dances, I could eat and drink all night; never gained a pound."

"Yeah, them were the days, everybody knew everybody and worked together too, all the dancin' and singin'..." The black man in the rocker said, sighing. The fat woman, ignoring him, picked up the bread she'd dropped and continued—"Yeah, he was a really good man."

Coral, knitting in the corner, remarked—"I thought I'd married a good man, and he drank too much, smoked too much, said the forbidden words always 'til he left me."

She sniffed, "good for nothin'."

Dellie cackled. "Got married at 21. Had nine kids. What the hell'd I ever do that for? You ain't married, is ye?"

The aide shook her head. "Well, don't." Dellie looked around her. "Jesus. 98 years old yesterday. Or was it the day before? How the hell'd I ever get to be that old? That's too old."

The fat lady looked across the room at Betty and winked at the little lady next to her before saying—"Well, Betty, you're awfully quiet today. What's the matter?"

Betty woke up and saw the aide. "You're a nigger, aren't you? What the hell do you want? Go away, you nasty thing." She strained at her ties and swung her fists.

The fat woman snickered and swallowed, the black man shook his head, Coral dropped a stitch; and the aide put Betty back to bed.

Melora Turco

In the Candy Store

At early-rising cages hang on the candy store. That's where I work. I poke my fingers through The bars and watch the street light from my poor Locked shell. Here, cool and sweet, it's shaded blue With Shadow. Last night's air still damps the jars. They wet my fingers when I have to move Them. I love the gloom. I am the candy whore. But raise the cages, dawn streams harsh and new.

Why can't I live with you with cages down? Look, in that jar I keep my lips. My hair stays in that other jar. I lock out the town, The dirty men who take me with their bear-like hands. Here is my jar of blood, my crown Of dark. Now won't you take me in your care? Let me feed my love to you, pound by sweetened pound.

Dianna Abu-Jaber
De-Evolution

Autumnal Equinox, the earth, she winds rewinds.
Five thousand years ago
In the penumbra of the cloud light.
What is this upon two legs?

Kiss your wife out in the street.
Girls will watch from a tavern window.
Now they know that you are he
That walks the earth and shakes their dreams.

It is the prime meridian,
It is the center of the earth.
Face of ape, the square hand of man
And the vernal springing from its command.

So where are you, my homo habilis?
How now ramapithecus
To save your hearth, your home, your madam,
Build tabernacles, supplicate to Adam.

Diana Abu-Jaber
Of Rats

Always

Pledges are mice; brothers are rats. This has been for as long as we have been a fraternity, and we were a fraternity before there was a me. Of course we have a Greek name; three letters nobody ever refers to us as, and we ourselves never use. We are quite simply, "The Rats," and when people come to fraternity parties, they come to the "Rat House." Every brother has the fraternity symbol hanging in his room; one of those soft rubber rats, suspended from the ceiling by a string; rats hung in quiet unobtrusive places so that unknowing passers-by can brush them with their shoulders, and we can enjoy their startled screams.

Pledges, of course, are lower in status than brothers. While they pledge, we are free to debase and abuse them as we please. This is the way it has always been. It was this way when I desire to stop those who come later from receiving the same ordeals. These are our traditions, and our traditions make us what we are.

It is obvious how we derived the title "mice" to describe the pledges. Mice are smaller and weaker and more timid than their larger cousins, and pledges correspond aptly to this comparison.

Spring

Through the winter, the real rats have been inside. I can hear them crawl through the walls when I walk through the house, and I hear them scurrying in the attic over my bed when I try to sleep. Although there is still snow on the ground, it is spring, and in that season, both rats and people like to emerge from their homes to feel the sun. The rats will leave the house soon, but they are not yet ready, for it is still cold. We however, are prepared to welcome them. All winter long they have warmed ourselves with our heat and grown fat with food, stolen from our kitchen at night. It is time to collect the rent.

A long pipe runs the length of the basement. It is shiny aluminum, and rats congregate in it. The pipe goes through the basement wall to the outside, and twenty brothers take position at that end. One brother remains in the basement; he is holding a metal frying pan. He calls us to readiness, and we pick up our tools which are neatly in a pile: baseball bats, slim metal poles, heavy rocks. I opt for a bat; it is the heaviest of the weapons, and it feels solid as I grip it tightly.

I bring my baseball bat down hard on its head. It quickly gives way to a firmer surface, as the head is crushed between the wood and the metal with a loud crackling sound. The body is pushed out into the ground by the rats behind it; they are frantic from the loud clanging, and they come out of the pipe in a steady flow, jumping down into the snow; we club them to death. One rat eludes our bats, and scrambles away from us through the snow. A brother throws a rock, and with a good shot, hits it in the back. The rat squeals loudly for a creature its size, and rolls over, writhing and squirming with a broken spine. Soon it lays quiet.

A brother collects the bodies in a large canvas bag, which he then totes away. We kick the fresh white snow over the area.

Periodically

I own what is advertised as a "humane mouse trap." It is a small cage with mouse food placed inside. When a mouse enters to eat food, the door closes behind it, leaving it trapped, but alive. When I catch one, I bring the cage down to the ocean. I put it down in the sand, several yards from the water. I place a heavy rock on top of the cage, and a rock on two sides, firmly mooring it in place. The mouse can see the water in front of it, and behind it, the beach. I watch it scurry about the cage for a while, and then I get down on my knees, and put my face very close to the cage. I must explain to the mouse.

"Look to the water if you are brave, or the beach if you are not," I tell it. "The out come is the same."

I stand up and brush the sand off my pants, then walk away, leaving the mouse to its own devices. Within a half hour, the tide creeps in, covering the cage, and drowning the occupant. I will return the next day, to retrieve the cage with its small ball of gray fur plastered limply to the bottom.

Once

When the rats threaten to overrun the house, someone will pick up a stray cat and let him loose in the walls. The cat remains inside for a while but eventually returns, content and sated from its foray into the shadowy world of wiring and insulation that holds the rats.

Once when we deemed that there were too many rats, we found a young cat, which we pushed through the walls. The cat would not come out, so a brother got an ax and chopped away at the crack until it was large enough to fit through. The brother emerged seconds later, and dropped the cat to the floor at our feet—it was dead. Its fur was half pulled out, and the naked skin was oozing blood.

The tail was mostly chewed away, as was the animal's face. The neck was ripped open, and a white vein hung limply, blood dripping slowly to stain the carpet. The cat had been ambushed by rats, and had managed to drag itself slowly to the safety it knew lay at the light. The rats had won this battle.

Pledging

There are fourteen pledges this semester—fourteen mice. We line them against the basement wall; a long table is set in front of them. On the table are fourteen cages containing one mouse each, and each cage has the name of a pledge on it.
I am the pledgemaster; I grip a wooden paddle as I survey the pledges. I shake my head, letting them know I am not pleased. Finally, I speak.

“Pitiful looking pledges,” I say sadly. “So pitiful I can’t ever imagine you becoming rats. Maybe you’ll stay as mice forever.” I pause, and look at the row of nervous faces. I look at the cages on the table. “Each of these cages contains your namesake,” I tell them. “You are like them—afraid and stupid. This will change. We make it change. You will not enter our brotherhood until you no longer bear resemblance to the animals in the cages set before you.” I clap my hands, and a brother walks forward, holding a live white mouse by the tail. I take the mouse, and return my attention to the pledges. “Long live the rats,” I declare loudly. “Death to the mice.” I toss the mouse in the air; in the same motion, I bring a paddle up and back, tennis style, and I slam the mouse into the wall across the room. It leaves a faint red smudge on the wall.

Halftime

The sound of the television is turned off during halftime; nobody is interested in listening to a school band, and at any rate, our entertainment is better. A live mouse tied to a string by its tail; the other end of the string is tied to a nail sticking out of the wall. We measure off five yards from the mouse and draw a line. Standing behind the line—one by one—we throw darts until one of the steel points penetrates the mouse’s body. We are very proficient in our aim; it never takes longer than halftime to hit the mark. Today we do exceptionally well; the second brother’s throw draws a hit, and as the squeaking slowly dies, there is nothing left to do except turn the sound back on the television.

More Pledging

The pledges are again lined against the wall, this time with hoods covering their heads. They stand there waiting, like blind monks, and finally I walk up to one of them. He is a troublemaker—the sort that questions what he is ordered to do. There is, of course, no room for insubordination of this nature—it will prompt the rest of the mice to disobey our orders.

“You have been surly in your responses to us,” I inform him. “We will not allow this from a mouse. You will learn obedience. Remove your belt.”

Slowly the pledge undoes his belt. I take it and drop it to the floor. I reach for the pledge’s stomach, and with one hand, pull the pants away from it—then I drop in a live mouse.

The pledge is silent unmoving for a moment; he is unaware of what has been done. Suddenly he feels the mouse crawling, and he screams a high-pitched scream. He jumps and writhes and begins to tear off his hood with one hand, all the while screaming. The hood flies off, and his eyes are wide with surprise and fear and his knees buckle and he falls in a faint. The mouse runs out the bottom of his pants, and scampers away into a crack in the wall.

The rest of the pledges stand mute—their heads are still covered, they don’t know what has just transpired. Still, they heard something happen, and their own imaginations will be deterrent enough should they ever consider disobedience again.

Night

A brother was almost killed by rats. He was asleep in bed, when they came through a hole in his ceiling, directly above him. They crawled over him, biting and rending flesh as he awoke and fought his way to the door into the lighted hall. We heard his frenzied cries for help, and ran out to see what had happened. By then, the rats were gone, leaving the brother dazed and bleeding, kneeling on the floor. He moved out of the house that night.

Hellnight

Hellnight is well named—having gone through it and having participated in it, I can think of no better phrase to describe the evening. The pledges, tired and scared after the hours of hellnight already passed, are lined up against their wall one last time. They are nude. Their bodies look pale and sickly in the brightly lit room. Smoke from a school band, and at any rate, our entertainment is better. The pledges are again lined against the wall, this time with hoods covering their heads. They stand there waiting, like blind monks, and finally I walk up to one of them. He is a troublemaker—the sort that questions what he is ordered to do. There is, of course, no room for insubordination of this nature—it will prompt the rest of the mice to disobey our orders.

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The rest of the pledges stand mute—their heads are still covered, they don’t
Summer

The rat population continues to grow in the house; there are so many that
stereos have to be turned louder to deafen their activity inside the walls. Few
seem to have left as they generally do in the summer—instead, they are every­
where. They have chewed through the ceilings of all the upstairs rooms—
another brother was attacked, and it is no longer safe to sleep in those places.
We even put poison down—a action we would generally consider cowardly,
but the situation is out of hand. The poison seemed to have no effect, at any
rate—there are still more rats than ever.

Fall

The new brothers have turned out well—better than we had expected. They
are very enthused about pledging, which begins soon, and their delight in killing
rats and mice. One is especially good—he is the one that was singled out for
disobedience. He has caught dozens of mice—these he seals in glass jars which
he keeps on his desk. He puts small holes in the lids so the animals can breathe,
and that is all he does. It is all he has to do. The mice scratch and claw, seeking
escape from the glass prison, and eventually they die from lack of food and water.

He also purchased a shotgun and a few pounds of rocksalt. He sticks the rifle
into the hole the brother chopped in the wall, and shoots off the gun. The rock­
salt is sprayed down the dark passageway, and he waits to hear the squeals of
pain retreating away before he pulls the gun out and leaves. Eventually this
became such a habit, that we were forced to stop, regardless of how many rats
he was killing. The stench of their bodies, decomposing behind the wall, was
becoming unbearable. Nobody could understand why the live rats would not
eat the dead ones.

A Dream

Last night I dreamt that we lost the house. We were awakened by the smell
of smoke—the house was on fire, and we all tried to run out, but some of us
didn’t make it. Seven brothers were burned to death inside.

When the fire finally went out, I was sitting amongst the black rubble that had
once been our home. An official from town was walking around—stooing to
examine something now and then, all the while making notations on a clipboard.
Finally, he approached me, and said that he had determined what had caused
the fire. He said it was rats. The rats had chewed through the wiring in the walls.

I woke up terrified, and pulled the blankets closer around me, feeling their
warmth dispel the fear. I lay there for awhile on my back, looking at the white
ceiling. I listened to the sounds above me; the small toenails clicking, the long
tails sliding, the squeaks and scratches, the sound of nibbling and gnawing. I
knew sleep would not come to me that night.

Jerry Klein

Self-Portrait

Not missing his wife,
four months after she left
for St. Paul, Minnesota
with the Olan Mill’s portrait man,
he sat wearing her bra, slip,
and imitation jade earings,
staring into the mirror of her vanity.

John O’Brien
The Morning News

An old man in a red flannel shirt works
His eggs between his teeth at the counter
Of this old restaurant on this cold morning
When I thought I’d come for enough coffee
To wake up, but the wind woke me outside.
People are soaking up the morning news.

The waitress mechanically gives change,
It’s been a long while since I’ve eaten here.
Nothing’s changed except now I sit alone.
You and I had eaten here many times,
Mostly you paid the bill and watched me eat;
Then laughing our cigarettes tasted better.

Steve Murabito

Traditions

I studied about the Indians, western ones.
I went for a visit.
They laughed when I rubbed chicken grease on my body.
Drunkenly, I explained myself.
I was mistaken.
Dancing Sun told me it wasn’t their tradition
But maybe they’d do it next time they ate chicken.

Steve Murabito
May These Two End One
Like Baucis and Philemon

I passed the man and collie every day
Around eleven-thirty as a rule,
And always by the bridge next to the school
In eastport. Even when the days were grey,
I saw those old companions side by side,
The collie slowly walking on the right.
His long, combed fur was faded tan and white,
Just like the old man’s cap and pants, sun-dyed
Shades lighter every summer mile. I tried
To keep the picture from my mind, of one
Old man alone out walking in the sun.

Lynne Cuthbert

The Fab-Four and the Hollywood Bowl

I remember, not so very long ago, a series of adventures surrounding the hopeless existence of two coupled pairs—low-life Jewish swingers, they were then, and how could I expect things to be any different now? Their’s was a life of leisure, which none chose to pay for with his pride; though there was an overabundance of that.

The Bloom’s and Stein’s began life, as Dave Smith, the poet once said, “as somebody’s beautiful babies;” and it was a constant struggle downward thereafter. Individually at first, the four components spent their time well with the Carnal, the Gluttons, the Panderers and Seducers, all of Dante’s scheme, and descended in unison to the year of no one’s lord, 1978.

And their lives and mine became, for a time, within reach of each other; they, middle-aged before their time, and I, still in a measure of a state of grace.

Their all too brief life together was characterized by a series of seemingly senseless attacks, both verbally and physically, on one another. Their affairs were both numerous and notorious, and the un-affairs and bimboish dreams of another were even more so. Outlandishness and sleaziness became a virtue, all at which the main contributor in mass, Belly, mastered handily.

And for a time, the lives of others mingled with theirs, much as mine had. One of the results of this being the occasional invitations to dinner, where all of the antics mentioned previous, plus a good deal more, were displayed to the amazement of all concerned. A main feature of these showings, often used to hold cooked peas and other small round vegetable matter, was a favorite bowl, descended from Hollywood, that always was displayed prominently and lovingly.

Occasionally too, this bowl would be used for other, more symbolic acts— for instance when on one enlightening day for me, while watching the Belly’s original mate bustling around the confines of their small kitchen, rushing in the production of matzo balls.
Belly's round proportions glided into sight of the hurried Jewess, on an ever-present film of grease. Gail, never one to ignore short cuts, sneaked around and behind her man's ponderous extremity, and placed the bowl between his legs. With her right hand, she slipped a pair of shiny chrome shears into the torn crotch of Belly's track shorts. Within an eye blink there was a snip, a cry of satisfied surprise, and the glimpse of two tiny wrinkled globes falling with a splash into the unknown depths of water the bowl held.

All rejoiced, for there would be a meal on the table that night.

But, as so very often happens, friends become fickle and strange in their ways, and the Bloom's and Stein's witnessed the spector of their closest confidents drifting away and into the shadow of other worlds, never to return. And so this happened to me, unlike others perhaps, with a hint of guilt, knowing that their varied aspects would no longer bring a smile to my lips, as they once had.

O their further decline, little can be said. But their image will forever live in the dark confines of a railroad tunnel in the middle of that town, that everytime I pass, I see their fevered movements in the light of an on-coming train, as the flotsam and jetsam flies to the walls, only to drip down again.

Frederick Neadle

My Wife

Gun aimed through motel room window. When she takes off her clothes, she is dead.

Frank Baxter
Give It A Go

'What ya like,' the waitress says as she slams a glass of water, ice in that glass heaped up, on the table, coffee comes next with a kind of splashing sensation. The head on my neck, still swollen from liquor wants to pinch her ass maybe, but I've got chipped fingers for that.

"I'd be havin' some of dem," fingers leave glass, fluttering over the coffee pot that she hammers to the table with a veinless wrist, and my fingers feel the steam from the pot and my fingers aim at a sign:

TOAST, EGGS, HOMEFRIES & COFFEE $1.50

"I have me some of dem toast, eggs, homefries and the what-not," wham, the words horde around, I pull a napkin from the dispenser and have I got time to think about going...

The waitress returns. A white plate with blurry images of flowers around the rim crashes to the table and rings and it leaves a hummin' kinda shri II sound in my ears.

"Thankee." My words almost seem to pop as I sprinkle salt, pepper, think, also, about applying some grape jelly to that homemade toast. The jelly looks fine, smoothed inside of a little carton, three cartons matter of fact before me— I didn't use any though. I have me an entire full pot of coffee. It steams inside of an insulated plastic container. Other people around me in diner don't know what they want to say. Waitress stands over them dabbing up slopped coffee with her apron. Waitress crashed a glass of ice water down on their table— it don't spill, but the cubes in the glass want out as they bounce up around the rim. I notice that they have hunger gnawing in tired eyes. There's a certain sense of pride in the face of a young lady, cheeks slightly glaring from the light above her that pounces down on all of us. Some kinda sweetness in her words as she bobs her head and orders.

There's that pot of coffee still stationed in front of me like a flaming oil tower. "I got an incredible amount of service." That's what I think as I notice that my eyes drag when I peep over the window sill to my right. "Yeah, there's a wall of some damn grocery store blockin my view." That's what's flowing through the head as I poke my fork into the homefries and "none of dem damn taters talk back." I poke a forkful into my mouth. "Damn taters never be talkin' back like dem blasted foremans." The jelly container is being pinched between my fingers. "There ain't nothin' like spreadin' jelly in the morning before that foreman spreads me out and hollers, 'Sweep that floor.'" The boy carting them dishes away, in gray tubs, don't want to be here. I sure don't.

I scurry off on my ten-speed, peddling as fast as that cramp in my calf can handle it. I swerve past a man in a gray suit, I say "howdy" with a grin. He looks at me like I'm some sorta ash tray. "There ain't no need for dem conclu-..." I say as I squeeze them handle bar brakes so hard that all the red stuff in the hands fly off to another part of my wrist. "And there's a few friendly folk around, up the street in that other diner." I swerve through an intersection with no traffic and the dirt sprays under the bike's wheels and I make my tire careen around a newspaper page as it leaps out from under a rusty mailbox.

"Glass a orange juice, no, make that tomato juice, please," There's no other words from me. I make some noise, though, while I wait for the juice, prying red sunburned fingers at the skinny napkins again, the metal clanking when the back of my hand collides with the dispenser casing. "Time to get out." The lady with the cigarettes smelling fingers slides an icy glass of tomato juice in front of me. "Thankee." I grin through egg-stained gums, and check the glass out for toast crumbs or any other stuff that might of fallen in there and I gulp it down.

There's lots of cars, hop-scotching, in and out, between them fading lines that some horde sketched all crooked. Too many of them city vehicles squirming in circles for me to deal with. I can't never make it on my two-wheeler. But "damn, I'll give it a go" and I ram into that street to be pounded on by that swarm of motorists, heads like hollow cylinders screaming their brakes and some of them got a notion to hammer their horns at me. "There ain't no need more applying brakes," I say to that mind of mine, that's good and swollen. Some damn truck driver coughing up rancid chewing tobacky, lays the horn, and he nearly sends me to the gravel. "Don't try to hornswoggle me," I scream and fly up onto the sidewalk safely. I rattle past an empty looking charactor who's sippin' some kinda squeezin's and I stop beside him and I say, "Man give it a go pal before these horned toads around here get ya," and I also tell him, "I'm headin' to Canada and I'm findin' me some crisp flowin' waterfall where I can watch salmon flingin' themselves up it." But he ain't listening to one thing I say. He just keeps tokin' on that bottle as he walks right past me.

I see Bush Lady up around the corner, a backpack lodged between them shoulder blades and I whiz up to her, coastering and I bust out with a "headin' my way," and Bush Lady smiles and stops. That hair of hers is drifting in the breeze and she's got travelin' in her knees. She's givin' it a go. She's givin' it a go up north, too.

"Where ya headin' Wheeler Man?" she says with a twitch of her spine and a hand wipes drops of sweat from those red brows.

"I'm gonna give it a go and head me to Canada. I'd be lookin' for a waterfall chuck full of salmon. No more sweepin' up someone else's metal filings and ceeear butts," I tell her with a lot of sincerity. We set a hearty pace because we know we got a go in mind. She's stepping peerty on that sidewalk, head adjusted just right so that mornin' sun gets into the roots of that bushy, red hair. Me, I'm prancin' impatiently with a shoe full of stones, walkin' my two-wheeler along side her, lookin' directly ahead to show people I got a go in that storage room above my shoulders.

"Give it a go," I say to Bush Lady as she whacks me on the back and tosses a
damn good size smile at me. I see a crunched soda can in my path and I give it a boot and it plows into a brick building. I hitch up some more conversation with Bush Lady. “Ya know, more people oughta give it a go like we’re doin’. I think there’s a tremor in everyone’s bones to push out.” Bush Lady comes around either that hand of hers and raps me a good one on the back, again.

“Wheeler Man, you’re talkin’ the truth. There’s no room around here where a person can flop their arms about freely. I’m scootin’ on out with a bundle of new deals in my pack. I’m sixty-three skiddling to a new resort.” Bush Lady wallows in thought for a moment. “Wheeler Man, there’s a new package waitin’ for us in a distant place.” She fumbles that hair on her head with positive fingers.

“Bush Lady slap me up aside the gord with some of dem travelin’ adventures of yours,” I say, kind of making the front wheel of my bicycle skip over the cracks in the sidewalk.

“I had a run in once while scalin’ Oregon with a dang bear. He was a fierce critter with teeth as sharp as injun spears. He came buckin’ toward me like a bush bender forest fire. Good thing for me there was one of dem Modocs in the area huntin’ fowl. He placed an arrow right between that bear’s gazers. That critter dropped like a topplin’ timber.” Bush Lady took time out for a moment to adjust the pack on her back. “That Modoc saved me hide. Got to be good friends with that injun. He showed me how to heave a blade properly.” Bush Lady yanked a blade, this big knife, out of her sack and sunk it into a nearby telephone pole.

“Damn it, Bush Lady, you’ve picked yourself up one bushel of a skill. It’s gonna be a priviledged givin’ it a go with you.” I crammed that hand of mine in front of Bush Lady and she smacked it with meaning.

“Wheeler Man, we’d be headin’ towards a new habitat. There’s sun strokin’ these feet.” Bush Lady raises one of those feet of hers up off the concrete and slaps it under my nose. That big toe of hers is flapping under her sock like a banked salmon. “We’d be givin’ it a go.” Bush Lady follows up her words with that foot falling back to the scratchy sidewalk. She brought that hand of hers around again, fingers clamped together as if she’s holding a rattler, and she wacked me a good one between the shoulder blades.

Steven M. Smith

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Lunchtime Romance

At lunchtime, your same greeting.
Never noticing I combed and parted
my rebellious hair
that opened sight to yearning eyes
demanding a response,
I quietly ordered my daily
tuna on rye with two milks.
“Next please” was your only utterance
from the beginning . . . Next . . . Please . . . Next
Day I ordered three pepperonis on hard rolls
thinking you prefer meat to fish.
“Next please” you said to the grease dimmed counter,
sliding down my order quickly.
 Didn’t you understand my allegiance?
When I mentioned the weather one day,
hoping to purchase a glance,
and only got my order, action had to be planned.
Next day the special ice cream soda you pushed at me
came back in your face and mouth,
stuffing your phrase with our favorite flavor.

Domenick Graziani
(untitled)

fire spirit,
send your vagabond shoes
across the sea
that I may walk again.

tell me, where, am I going,
how to follow the stars
and bury the darkness.
yesterday there was
a funeral for the sun
and the stars stole the moon.
the crystal ball
has broken
shattering dreams and desires.

the rose you left for me
has withered,
molten petals
by your bedside—
ancient reminders
of our love.

fire spirit,
send your candlelight eyes
across the sea
that I may laugh again.

Lisa Bleasdale

Bastards Lament

The bell rang, immediately causing the hallway to become crowded. It was lunchtime, and after spending the first five periods cooped up I had a burning ambition to run out into the street. High school— I loved it and hated it at the same time. I hated it because of people like John Stern.

Dodging the bus that was quickly approaching the parking lot by the baseball fields I saw Stern hanging out. That was all he ever seemed to do, hang out and cause trouble. I reached for the three quarters I knew I had stuffed in the bottom of my Levis pockets. Trying to look natural, I pulled them out and shoved them into my boot. If I didn't prepare, I knew I'd soon part with my lunch money.

"Hey faggot," was his greeting. It was quite expected on my part. "Got any change faggot? I heard you had a big night at Craig's last night." He was referring to the restaurant I bussed tables at. "Come on you fucking piece of shit, give me my CHANGE!" With that he reached for the sleeve of my baseball jacket. Somehow I flung my arms at his and ran. I ran, and I'm not ashamed to admit it. I did a lot of running from John. It bothered me because I could never figure out why he was after me, why he always chased me. Anyway by this time, after almost two years of putting up with his abuse I had just learned to avoid him.

That afternoon I got out of baseball practice early. Since I was pitching the next day I got to practice light. I ran my last lap and noticed Stern leaning on the fence by the track. It bothered me, seeing him stand there, looking into space. It was almost as if he envied me, as if I had something he was lacking. I hurried to finish up, then showered.

I made my way up the stairs to the second floor, where my locker was located. As I approached it, I realized that something was amiss. My books were scattered at the front of the water fountain. There were the ashes of newspapers in the bottom, along with some scorched remains I couldn't recognize. I looked on the hook where I hung my jacket, and my heart sank. The jacket was gone. I walked down the hall and found it uselessly burnt beyond repair. The next day they told me who had done it. They didn't have to tell me that it was Stern.

He gave me a lot more hell that spring; elbows in the face, slashed tires on my bike. He broke into my locker many more times, but I finally got into the habit of leaving it empty. I had words with him a few times, but talk didn't affect Stern. Nothing seemed to penetrate the thick skull of the person who terrorized me so effectively. I often wondered how such a person could've ever been someone's infant at one time. I often wondered how anyone could be his mother. I just couldn't see him ever being vulnerable or fragile. It was perplexing though, because it was almost as if I was drawn to him by the way I yearned to understand what I could not: what caused him to be such a bastard.

My friends were never really any help at all; he was just too damn big and too damn crazy. I used to see him in his beat-up Dodge driving down Bayberry
Lane. More than a few times I really believed that he was aiming at me.

After my second year of college I saw John for the first time since Graduation Day. I had stopped off at a friend’s house and we were sitting on the hood of my father’s car when he drove past, still in his Dodge. He didn’t see me.

“There goes a bastard,” I said. We had been discussing our situations at school, and I had just finished saying that my parents were putting me through financially, so this sudden change in the subject must’ve shocked her.

“Why do you say that?” she said. “Have you always thought that way about him?”

“Yeah I have,” I said. “He always bugged the shit out of me, all through high school.”

I didn’t go into the things he had done, or how his behavior spooked me. At that point my friend looked away and turned overly quiet. It was as if she wasn’t telling me something, as if she was protecting the person I hated more than anyone in the world. At that moment I realized that any horrible secret he may have had couldn’t make up for his deeds. I held contempt for him, and nothing could change it. Sure, feelings of remorse crossed my mind, but quickly slipped through my mind and melted like butter on a hot skillet. I almost wanted to hear dirt on him; I wanted to know something about his past that would satisfy the sadistic streak that he had molded inside me. After a few minutes of silent thought, my friend interrupted the quiet.

“Dave,” she said. “Didn’t you ever hear about John?”

“No,” I replied. “I only know how he terrorized me.”

“I went to grammar school with John,” she said. “He was a really nice guy until the sixth grade,” she said, again looking down.

“What happened then?” I asked.

“He got home from school one day late. His father was supposed to be home, but the car was gone. John didn’t have a key so he climbed into the house through his parent’s bedroom window, the bedroom in which his father hardly ever slept since he was away often. His mother was hanging in the closet.”

Somehow I had my peace.

David George
**Tireless Strider**

Tireless Strider

Barefoot and stonefaced, you’ve run through streets
lined with numberless stirring masses
who eyed your every boundless stride.
Who followed with soft stares your calloused feet,
detached from the winding tar, which rolled and rose
like hot sap against the others’ shoes.
How unlike your African foothills
was the untame pavement of the city.
How unlike the others’ pained progress
were your unwavering features and flow.
Tireless Strider, the streets became your foothills,
the masses, your childhood trees and leopards,
for in motion, you were home,
setting the pace all others must follow.

For Abebe Bikila, late Ethiopian marathon runner.

Domenick Graziani

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**The Dance**

The bus isn’t late, but it might as well be— I’m early and have to wait. The street is almost hidden in the morning mist and only J.C. Penney’s towers above the fog and monstrous businessmen.

I hate standing here waiting as though my reason for being here can be similar to any one of the people who crowd me. All I want to do is get somewhere... I want to go to the theatre.

My leotards and dance suit are hidden by the polyester-cotten-leather of my street clothes. A bald man with a paper and little boy walk by me and for all they know I could have the Wall Street Journal plastered in brandy, hugging my chest.

But of course they couldn’t know, and even more likely, they wouldn’t care. Just as they didn’t care eight years ago right before Dice was born. They packed me carelessly in revolving doors and made me stand, big as a horse, in a space on the bus only big enough for a New York model. I really didn’t like the city then, and waiting in the city now is just as catastrophic.

I’ve spent all of those earlier years in drudgery, and semi-conscious bliss. All movement by habit, and if dinner wasn’t ready on time, I only asked that they excused the mechanical difficulty.

Today, of all days, my program has been re-channeled, and despite the mass-transit difficulty, all else has been rehearsed, I know each step as well as the next, and all the beats that go with them.

I’ve hated almost all of the past— maybe the mother bit mostly. Seems somehow that it doesn’t phase me now, but then it was like living as a monk— a chained monk. I really don’t know why I allowed myself to die like I did, but then, I guess you get exponentially numb— bored equals bored squared. Always. And the circle is unbroken.

Finally I realized that it could be. Until then I felt dizzy from running the race. It seemed less painful that way, I guess, at least easier than finding a new path. And all Carmen thought I cared about was the apartment and all my rag-battering about dirty socks and smelly litter boxes confirmed this.

But I’d bitch because it was me who had to scrub it, clean it, make it white by five. The apartment was my noose, and it clinched tighter each and every time I bent down to pick up a dirty glass. And that dull, miserable bedroom— where I folded the clothes, picked lint balls off the Sears carpet, and knocked the dead flies from the window pane. That bedroom was the worst of it all. At night, I’d set the alarm, brush my teeth and climb into bed, where some of the times I had to fake a half dozen moans before I could get to sleep, so the next morning I could again do my routine.

Perhaps it wasn’t all as bad as I make it now. There were times that we shared a laugh or forgot about our dishes and papers to go to a movie. Most of the time I wanted no one around. I yearned for my privacy, sliced thick with deadening silence.
The weekends were the worst; I had to clean around him while he sat back in his chair, squinting at his books.

“You wouldn’t care if I went to the moon and did this!” I’d scream, trying to vacuum around his feet.

“My dear Caroline, you couldn’t do this on the moon.”

“What?”

“A vacuum-cleaner works on the principle of air pressure. There’s no air on the moon... no pressure.”

Silence. And then:

“Well, fu-u-ck you!” I said in pseudo-chromatics. “You’d probably expect me to anyway!”

Dice giggled from the television room, and it was then that I realized how old we all were getting.

Old? Then, I met Megan at Dice’s school during open-house. She had two in school at once—two girls—and long shapely fingers that caressed their blond heads, as though it was the total function of motherhood. She did everything very well. She mingled, laughed, and drank Tab with the finesse of a princess, while Girl 1 and 2 charmed the pants off of Carmen.

‘A commercial for Geritol,’ I thought as I drank the cream and sugar in my coffee and watched from the corner by the Food’s Group Chart. I watched her for most of the third grade and on into the fourth; tall, lean, too anxious to laugh even at the merest joke. And the more I saw, the older I felt—a bag of Granny Bones wrapped in vitamin-D deficient skin. Where the hell was her hus­band, her split ends, her mother-fat?

Needless to say I finally met her. She spoke like something out of a Monroe flick. We talked about some movies and the Girls, how great Tab was for the body, and better for the soul. She talked really, and I mostly listened. I kept wishing she’s turn the subject to something I could discuss—Popeye, maybe, or even waxed beans.

We met again, and talked. Sometimes she’d almost listen; her blue eyes slanted, her mouth relaxed. She told me about the times she danced with the figure and good for the soul. She talked really, and I mostly listened. I kept wishing she’d turn the subject to something I could discuss—Popeye, maybe, or even waxed beans.

I enrolled the next day after she told me about the company. Immediately I went home to work out a yogurt, wheat germ and yeast diet. The class met on Thursdays, so I spent the next six days concentrating on pointed toes, buying black bodysuits, and munching on mush. I’m not sure what I was anticipating, but it kept my mind off of General Hospital.

That was a year and seven months ago, and today is my first recital—at least the first time that I’ve dance in front of anyone but the rest of the club, Carmen and Dice. Somehow my family doesn’t count though, and the dance club is certainly in no position to watch me while they are straining for the fourth position.

The ballet, when I put my mind to it, is graceful and articulate; and more painful than my first lay. I almost never think of it as being done right unless it’s done painfully. Carmen and Dice still exist, yes—but differently. The funny thing is, they don’t even know it.

Even when I do the dishes, I do them differently; my mind drifts easily away from them, and unto my second life. As I clean a rag, or make a roast, I do it differently too; but I suppose that it still tastes the same. Carmen doesn’t laugh at me anymore, at least not until he sees me meticulously and scrupulously reach for the sky and grimace painfully, in hopes that maybe my mouth can gape gracefully, too. He no longer listens to me when I come home with my battered muscles and groan all the way to the hot bath. He wants to laugh, though, and with every laugh he doesn’t laugh, I work harder on my steps.

I have spent hours at home in the apartment—from the time it becomes mine in the morning when Dice and Carmen leave, until I hear the sound of Dice’s feet scurrying up the carpet and the two flights of stairs to our front door. It is always his feet I hear first, and I often wonder if he hears mine as they pad around the living-room, and fly into the cigar stale air of our chicken-coop. Always, though, before he catches me one-twoing across the room, I fly into the bathroom, where he always finds mommy soaking in a hot tub, ridding herself of all the grime and filth of exertion. And after my bath, I feel clean enough to cook the evening meal—most of which Dice won’t eat anyway, even though his father explains the nutritional value of every item.

Today’s routine is short, and I know it well, but there’s something about the first time you dance in front of an audience. Deep inside my own head, I know that people watching should never make a difference to me, but I get paranoid walking across the street for fear that the people in the cars will all comment on the flimsy, indolent padaddling through.

The bus finally farts around the corner and along with sixteen and a half other people I climb aboard, find a seat close to the middle, but closer to the back, and wait for the intersection of Lafayette and Poplar. The bus is typically crowded, and the oxygen if there is any, is bound in sweat and bad breath. The masses kill me.

Again, I wait and wonder anxiously about the next few hours. Somehow I know that to think about it will make me immobile, and certainly that is the last of what I need. I climb off the bus and walk the remaining two blocks to
the theatre, glad to be away from the bushy eyebrows and bursting paper bags.

I was the first of the dancers to come, and I was glad of it. It gave me time to
strip from my street clothes and do some warm-up routines. Still, no one
arrived, so I went downstairs, bought a Tab off of a crummy old machine and
lit a cigarette. I rarely smoke, but then, I rarely dance in front of people.

Megan was the first to come and she walked in, fresh, fragrant and calmly ready.

"Hi, Caroline," she called to me and returned later in her dance clothes.

"Excited?" I blurted out, and wished I could bite the end of my tongue off
and spit it to Japan. Instead, I began some leg stretches, and wished that she'd
trip over my purse that lay on the floor, by the exercise bars.

"Excited? Not excited. Happy to get away from that darn book, though."

"What book?" I asked, feeling as though it was my duty.

"Oh, just something I'm trying to decipher in my free time. Between the
children, dancing and making meals, I barely have time to wash my hair." She
sighed a China-doll sigh and flipped her well-brushed hair over her left shoulder,
leaping with pointed toes over the purse, landing as silently as a cat.

"What's it about?" I rolled over and started leg lifts, wishing that she'd stop
watching me.

"Philosophy. I'm really getting into Nietzsche—he has the right ideas about
a lot of things. Very poignant, ver de societe!"

"I don't speak German," I retorted, and tried to pick the lint off my black suit.

Her eyes squinted up into blue-violent slopes and she started some stretches,
Hey, you ready for your seven-step solo? She smiled and lifted her leg with her
hand, trying to get it above her head.

"It's not a solo exactly. You guys will be there. I just... do something
different."

"Yes, and how different you do it," she laughed. "Besides honey, you got
the grande finale... el fin!" Her hand flew into the air and I grimaced at her
wail of the trumpets. Yet it caressed me, and lifts my mind thankfully from
the room.

We were nearing the end of the routine; approaching my solo, and my stomach
leaped like an ostrich that can't quite make it off the ground, regardless of the
wings on its back. I decided I didn't care. I didn't interrupt the fluidity of my
movement. Alone, here was my chance to titilate the masses, the herd, the
double-chins and standards. I will become, and later I will cook the evening meal.

The time finally came. I felt transfixed as we set ourselves on the stage.

There was only one act after ours. A magician, a long-haired Sixties type, who
wasn't very good, but I figured I was going to meet all types whenever I ventured
out of my safe little apartment.

Again I found myself waiting, this time for the curtain to rise. And it finally
did; slowly at first, then very jerky, until at half mask it was shipped wildly; and
the audience caught our faces before they wore the mask of performers. The
music was cued and we began the routine. At first I looked into the audience
and their blank faces— all sizes, all shapes, all stupidly watching our dance. I
began to wonder if we could effect them, and then decided to just look above
them, concentrating on my body and the work my mind wanted it to do,

I am twelve pounds lighter than my open-house days, and I try desperately to
remember that I'm slim. It helps me to soar. I even feel sexy as I stretch,
counting ones and twos in short breath intervals.

I am dancing— actually more easily than I expected. The music seems real
enough to lean on. I begin experimenting with the beat, leaning dangerously
into the upbeats, and recovering my mind enough to catch the fleeting down­
beat. I soon find that I know this well enough to forget what the hell I'm doing
and feel the others flutter across the hardwood floor of the two-bit theatre. I
close my eyes to hear better, and I have the most exciting way to dance— to
totally out of the rays of the spotlights that throw wingers around the brows of
the audience.

The music drifts around me, and I recall that I never found out who wrote it—
but he must have been lonely— my joints ache from the woo of the strings and
the wall of the trumpets. Yet it caressed me, and lifts my mind thankfully from
the room.

I decided at any rate, to keep away
from her—I didn't need the anguish of her smile.

I didn't hear them at
first, my mind was juxtapositioned between the spaces in my eyes, and it shook
undone my limbs, perfectly balanced and taut. I held the pose, painfully and
with a relief I've never known. Until they were laughing. I didn't hear them at
first, my mind was juxtapositioned between the spaces in my eyes, and it shook
me like a Westinghouse alarm— unconsciously at first, then with the violence of
repitition. The harshness of their throaty roars ripped open my eyes and I froze
in the light of their barbarity. I flew my head around to find that the rest of the
dancers were gone and the magician was on-stage, a few feet ahead of me. He
held a scarf and a wand. And a smile. I wanted to kill him— them— the whore.

He came to me, as I stood there, and before he reached me, the music began
again. Music of a different style. A different angular beat. I felt the rage like a
flood of burnings, and the smoke teared my eyes. I closed them. . . weak with
the stabbing of the knives as they ate my stomach raw. I couldn't stand there
aching, shaking and crying like a fool.

I danced. Again I felt the music, yet it hit the curves of my body, and
sharpened the hurt of their roars. I cracked open my eyes quickly, just in time
to meet his face—distorted, hot with laughter, and ripe with joy. He waved his hands around my body, letting the scarf brush my suit, cling and fall from me like rain. I kept on dancing, each step trying to phase out the howls. I wanted to fly out of there, but felt the hard floor wrap tightly around my ankles.

The magician tapped my left thigh, stinging me with the wand and stepped back; then my right arm, whipping me harder than before. I could no longer dance... I fell to the floor, ringing with the sensation of over-exertion and fatigue in my brain. Yet he continued, wheeling in circles around my body, crumbled on the stage.

I opened my eyes, and they clung to the floor. I moved enough to see Megan backstage, laughing like the rest. I couldn't hear her; I could see nothing, but I saw her throat jerk with the work of laughter. The fury grew within me... faster than the pain, its heat made me swollen. I felt heavy, sick—water blocked my vision, but I swung, and every time I connected, I shook off some of the pain. We both went down; her kicking, scratching like a cat, collecting fragments of my dishpan skin beneath perfectly lacquered nails. I swore, bit and kicked, while hands grabbed and tore at us, trying to pry us apart. I wanted more, but my body sank to the wood, heaving in the darkness and sobbing wildly. Finally I could collect my gear, and return home—to my boy, my husband, and the half-frozen chicken melting blood on the counter.

Trisha Hannon