THE GREAT LAKE REVIEW

SPRING 1998

Editor - in - Chief: Jill Chmelko
Treasurer: Erin McCarthy
Business Liason: Christina Becallo
Editorial Staff: Kathryn Lipphardt
Rasheda O'Neal
Debbie Leone
Leigh Laroussini
Sara Agle

cover design by Jill Blachura
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MEETINGS:
every Tuesday at 6:00p.m.

WE ARE NOW ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS FOR
--FALL 1998--

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

5...First College Boyfriend - Kathleen McKenna
6...The American Dream in the Form of a Sestina - Melissa Meola
8...Excessive Musing - D.R.M.

15...Drowning -
16...Untitled - Coral Smart
17...The Essence of a Hue - Andrew Otto
18...Marie - Christina Becallo
19...A Breed Apart - Scott Williams
25...Who Had the Strength to Sew Me In - Andrew McIlwraith
26...Heatwave - Holly Dilatush-Guthrie
27...monologue from I'll Take the Fall - Benjamin Derby
29...A Description of Compromise - Alana Smith
30...And They All Fell Down (excerpt) - Jamie Hutt
36...No Substitutions - Marion E. Green
38...Haikus and Senryu - T.J.M./Anthony Mazzorana Jr./Jill Chmelko
39...(What is Becoming) Usual Conversation - Jennifer Eighmey
40...Generational - E.H. Deull
50...Proving Our Existence - Michelle Carini
51...Stars and Stripes Forever - Erin McCarthy
53...monologue - Mike Betette
FIRST COLLEGE BOYFRIEND
by Kathleen McKenna

A non-practicing Catholic, his hobbies include skipping his medication (I should mention he’s manic depressive) and preaching his rationale for being a point blank dick. “I’m a raw truth kinda guy.” On occasion, he’s likely to pull out his camping gear and explain how this little trinket strapped to his carburetor could enable him to drive for hours to some desolate corner of the earth and have a baked potato ready by the time he got there. This and the rest of his multi-functional playthings are neatly packed and ready to go should he ever feel the need to flee.
Go to school, go to college; day after day
work your life away. To pay the bills, earn money,
bring home the bacon, oops - beans, broken dreams. Work out,
work in the office, work in the yard, clean the house, never play,
limit your sleep. Don’t act like a woman, or a man.
He who dies with the most toys wins. Where’s the wealth
in this? Something more for me, something more in life than wealth
to obtain; more than paper to greet me at the end of my day.
Anger in the voice that whispers to me goodnight. I pity man -
mankind-in its veiled shadows of unobtainable peace. “Why,
to have money
is all you need!” And constant stimulation on the tube, playing
your video games, jerk off to anorexic teenagers, before finding
yourself out
on the streets. Out of a job, out of style, outcast, out
of dreams. Hopes shrouded in grey while all around you screams
of wealth
and consume, consume, consume! On the corner a veteran plays
his sax. Eight fingers roam freely as young boys’ hands in
girls’ panties; day
unto night, into morn, how forlorn he must be when $2.50 is all the money
he has to buy bread. To be dead must be better than to be a man
who can no longer be a man. He takes a piss and wonders if he
is still a man.
Wonders if hard could replace soft. Oh, a soft touch would work out -

so long it has been! What cruel fate could deny the unlated? No money
can purchase instinct - oh, but it can repress it. No wealth
can unleash lust-but Disney can buy 42nd Street. Where now to spend
the day
with your own hand down your pants playing
with yourself, flaccid, because for with you there is no one left to play.
And you curse yourself for being short, fat, bald, pockmarked; a man
instead of a woman who could have it anytime, anyplace, any day,
(or so you believe). So you grab your bottle of spirits just to black out,
block out, forget about all the lies you were fed, the wealth
of shit you were fed about the American Dream, when you know it all
amounts to money.
Money to buy your clothes, food, house, drink, love. Money
to buy your sex, your forgotten dreams, someone to play
with the kids while you’re out making more money. Sitting in the wealth
a hundred dead souls have bought, where there once was a man
now lives an android. Emotionless. Emptiness. The only time out -
side is walking from the house to the car, to the office, to the car. When
was the last time
you spent the day playing with the kids in the park?
Or making love to your wife like a man, eating her out like a man?
Wrap that money around yourself and fuck your wealth.
EXCESSIVE MUSING
by D.R.M.
(for Lena)

Blood rushes to my head
as the young woman seats me at a window booth
in the corner of the restaurant.
I have to gnaw on my lip when I take the menu,
as her hand brushes the back of mine by mistake.
I fumble over the few selections
as though they were written in Swahili,
but she takes my order patiently, looking
at me like a woman does when she’s been admired
all her life for beauty. As she leaves,
a droplet of water winds its way down the window,
and I think of the two of us walking in the rain,
and how I want her to look at me
the way the man on the television looked
at the miracle juicer he was selling last night.
I imagine she’s a romantic, that she
listens to Mozart in the evening, and writes poetry, too,
that she talks to her plants and wishes on falling stars.
I glimpse her behind the counter rinsing out a glass pot,
and the dark strand she missed with her hair tie
becomes the same one I gently
move aside
as we kiss on a park bench.
If she would give me an opening, I could start a conversation;
we could talk about movies over coffee,
or read together on a blanket at the beach.
An old man seated to my left gives me a wink
as though he was a father reassuring his son,
when she starts towards us with my order,
and I wonder if my face is advertising my thoughts.
I sip water from a glass that we might share
over a picnic, while she places the food on the table.
She hesitates before leaving me, but I can
only grin and nod my head in a silent thank you.
She’s already worn me out, and I don’t even know her name.

SILVER ANNIVERSARY
by Lyncee Sauer

I work in this bar called Finnegan’s Wake. It’s a nice place,
quaint and personal; everyone pretty much knows each other. There’s a
dart board and a pool table in the back by the door, and a golf game and
poker machine out front. Who plays golf when they’re out on a Friday
night is beyond me, but anyway, it’s still there.

It was a dyke bar before it was Finnegan’s Wake, or should I say
a lesbian bar. I guess political correctness doesn’t really concern me, so it
was a dyke bar. Anyway, the point is the bathroom doors used to both
say women on them, and there is a small piece of duct tape covering the
“wo,” hence, making a men’s room out of what was formally designed
for women. I often wonder what men think when they see that door just
prior to entering. What does it make them feel like, entering a place for
women only? Probably they don’t think anything at all. Men are pretty
stupid; hell, men are all fucking idiots. Did I mention that I don’t like
men? I’m not entirely sure why, either; I think it’s something embedded
deep in my psyche, repressed and beyond retrieval. Although truthfully
I know exactly why, I just choose not to deal with the reality. I’m not gay,
though, and I can’t explain that either. I hate men, but I still sleep with
them, which isn’t very logical. It doesn’t make sense to me, so I don’t
expect anyone else to make sense of it.

Occasionally when it’s slow, I throw some quarters on the pool
table and shoot a game or two. I shoot pretty well, for my gender
anyway. Invariably, men will whisper to each other and smile, then
make comments like “you’re pretty good for a girl,” or “you must
practice a lot,” or “do you have your own table?” Actually, what they’re
really smiling about, what they’re really saying is “she’s a dyke,” and
usually in more colorful terms. Not only does my intuition tell me that’s
what they’re saying, but sometimes I hear it. Guys who drink more beer
than they should usually
have a tendency to talk louder than they
should, too.

It’s funny, or at least a paradox to me, how stereotypical and
provincial men can be. For instance, any woman who shoots good stick
is a dyke. However, if I used the wrong end of the cue or miscued every
shot, then that would be cute, just what they want to see. I guess the
sneers, whispers and looks are simply a conveyance of their contempt for
my ability, their disappointment that they can’t demonstrate to me the
proper way of holding the cue or the correct way I should stand. What­er
reason, men remain a mystery to me, a fascinating epitomized
example of self-proclaimed powerful fucks. So that’s where I work. I
said I liked the place, not the people.

I work there six nights a week, and during the day I work on my
even after all these years. The last thing he said to me was, “I’ll have one
more, then I’m taking off.”

Trying my damndest to be social—almost flirtatious, since I knew
that would get me what I wanted— I said, “I don’t know, the more I look
at you, the more I think I should ask you for some ID.”

He smiled at me, flirting back, which made my stomach turn and
my legs weak, but he showed me his license. Sure enough, we had the
same last name. He lived in Maryland now. I tried initially to memorize
his address; for a brief second I wished I had a photographic memory,
and the next second I decided I really didn’t give a fuck where the hell he
lived. I ran my thumb across his license and tossed it back to him. I
looked in his eyes for a moment; there were no romantic connotations
coming from my gaze this time, I was just pissed, which seemed to make
him very confused. I gave him his beer, resumed my seat at the end of
the bar, and continued working on my puzzle.

The next time I looked up from the puzzle was when he got up
to leave. I watched him walk out the door— not a thanks, not a word, not
even a glance. He opened the door and was gone, leaving me fifty cents
worth of memories on the bar and an empty bottle.

let me drown in lengths of silken
hair forever,
seeing the world at once through
brown eyes my own
and the angled eyes of a man
let me know what it feels like
to carry between my legs
the making of a legend:
a dynasty of pale faces
forever framed in the same flowing hair
what is it to be not the flower
but that which dives in face-first
with abandon so complete
it’s as if that’s all there ever was?
what is it to glance into the mirror
and see an angled jaw and powerful chest,
and to touch them knowing
they are forever mine?
is this body really mine to hold?
i let you hold me in such a way
as to let you become a part of me,
a part that i want
that i need
to grow more alive with every simultaneous breath
i let you drown me each night
gasping for air so sweetly
forgotten
in the ancient fury of it all,
and my mind wanders it
strays to the place where you
carry me in your two
strong arms
and walk on your two
strong legs;
carry me to the burning ends of the earth
and back again,
in one last
quivering
breath...
UNTITLED
by Coral Smart

I woke up in a chipped ceramic sink
in a 12th Street apartment.

The heat was penetrating. The sweat bathed the young woman,
writhing in the sharp toothed grasp of my father.
He tasted Mama’s raw flesh with his salacious tongue;
he stole my mama’s chastity.
He was an onanist, and his splatter washed up into Mama, and I
was conceived.
She didn’t know him, but he called her Mary,
his guttural utterings taunting yet cooing
as he slipped his tongue between his teeth.

His whispers stopped when he saw, somehow,
she was not Mary and he slapped her.
Mama stumbled down 12th Street, tears
trickling down her thigh,
and fell into the gutter.
When she woke, she limped to her apartment,
swollen and bruised- she could not talk.

Later that year, Mama bore me, and I first cried
in the chipped ceramic sink.
Mama would look at me through blackened eyes
and offer me a swollen breast.
I was born with teeth, and it made her nipples raw.

We would sit and stare at the streaked plaster walls
and pray God would carry us in a soap-scented breeze
to a land of sweet grasses and pomegranates, and we
would no longer be hungry. We waited for God to take
us, deliver us from ourselves and this wasted life,
but he didn’t come.

Mama died today. As I rode here in a cab from 5th Street, I
remembered the cold, gouged linoleum and Mama’s bruises.
I didn’t remember the violets in the kitchen, or the silvery
patterns on the wall from the sun. And now I stare
at the puckered walls of my youth and I wish Mama had lived
to see a decent apartment.
That she had learned to love herself.

THE ESSENCE OF A HUE
by Andrew Otto

A hue, a color, a shade; one looks better
to you from the start. Light or dark?
Reddish, yellowish, pinkish, brownish
or blackish.

What’s your favorite color? Mankind
is stuck on this. What’s so important
about a shade I’m sorry I seemed to miss.

For what’s ugly about it or pretty, causes
people to dislike themselves and by far
this is a pity.

Blacker is a slave to the earth, strong
and dumb, too. Whiter is heavenly, soft
and ingenious to man. Ignorance makes
us believe this to be true.

So you hate me, or you like me, like
a fad, or a chameleon whose color comes
and goes. Why the color of skin is so
important, only God knows. Yet still
the shade of one’s skin is powerful enough
to make us love, prefer, and hate each
other ’til the point when we’re all blue.
Hmm... this seems like a nicer color,
the meaning lying within the essence
of a hue.
It was the mid 1940's when it was not proper for a woman to divorce her husband, but my grandmother did. A strong-willed woman, courageous in her own right, she refused to tolerate the abuse of Anthony.

She was a mother to four girls, and my mother was the baby—like me. Mom would tell me stories of a woman named Marie whom I could never get to know.

Marie worked in a factory sewing by dim light to pay the bills. Her motivation was in the form of her daughters: Angelina, Gloria, Ann and Florence.

My mother, Florence, told me how Marie named her—after a furnace that kept them all warm in the New York City winters. Funny how I always assumed it was because of that great Italian city.

Marie took care of her girls but never let go of her desire to be social. On Friday and Saturday nights she'd go out with her lady friends or the occasional man, but never let anyone tie her down.
best of his career.”

Sometimes my girlfriend watched movies with me, but it was usually a miserable experience for both of us. All she wanted to do was cuddle up next to me, when all I wanted to do was concentrate on the action. I would do whatever she wanted to do after the movie, but when I was watching a movie, I actually wanted to watch it. I know that concept sounds absurd to those people who talk and ask questions during a movie, but that’s why they’re idiots and I’m not.

Another thing my girlfriend did when we would watch films together was tell me how I should go back to finish film school and go out to L.A. and become an award-winning director. As if it were just that easy. I would go to some producer in L.A. and say, “Hi, I’m Richard Harris, and I don’t know you, but will you spot me a few million dollars so I can make a movie? Qualifications? Well, I have no body of work to show you, but my girlfriend really thinks I have a lot of talent.” It doesn’t work that way. Why couldn’t she just be happy with the way things were? I was perfectly content with my life as it was. I didn’t need a film making career to muss things up.

As I pondered all of my life’s little problems, I noticed a man in the store who was trying to go into the adult video room without being seen by anyone else in the store. The problem was, he was trying so hard to look inconspicuous that he actually drew attention to himself. Customers who rent pornos were always the funniest to watch, especially when you knew them and they knew you. I could tell simply from looking at him that he was a mindless ball of testosterone. He believed that Jean-Claude Van Damme never had showered in quite some time. My attention was diverted from his ugly, unshaven face by the mere smell of his sweat and pizza-stained white T-shirt. In his right hand, he held the same senselessly violent action flick that he had watched the week before, only this time it had a different name and different actors.

“Is ‘Speed 2’ just as good as the original?” he asked me. Why would a person like him ask a person like me a question like that? We were obviously two different classes of people, so why would he have even valued my opinion?

His lack of common sense deeply upset me, and I found myself replying, “Well, let’s see, the movie barely has a plot, and there is no chemistry between either of the leading roles, but that shouldn’t matter to a muttering imbecile like yourself.”

The idiot had no idea what I was talking about, but my manager, John, overheard what I had said and quickly took notice. He pulled me aside and said, “What are you doing, Dick? You can’t talk to a customer like that!”

What a jerk John was. He knew I hated it when people called me Dick. That pissed me off even more than that foolish customer.

“Cool your jets, Johnny boy,” I said with an evil grin. “Both you and I know that someone as stupid as him doesn’t deserve a straight answer. What he deserves is to be taken out back and shot. You saw what happened. I insulted his intelligence and he was too dumb to even realize it. You’re the only one who seems broken up about what I said to him. Why don’t you just go back into your little office, pull yourself back together and come back out with my check so I can get the hell out of here.”

John glared at me for a few seconds, then turned around and started towards his office. I stood there and laughed as he slowly walked away from me. He was in his office for about five minutes, then he marched back with my check in his hands. He angrily handed me the check and spat out, “Don’t bother coming in tomorrow, or ever again for that matter.”

“Whatever you say, Johnny,” I said with a laugh, already halfway out the door. “See you tomorrow.”

I hopped into my rusty red 1989 Cavalier and sped out of the lot. I was going to have to hurry if I was going to make it to the bank before it closed. I had to turn the radio off when I was halfway there because I couldn’t stand it anymore. I firmly believe there aren’t anymore radio stations worth listening to. Everything is so repetitive. The last thing I needed on my mind was radio stations, though. My attention was supposed to be fixed on getting my sorry self to the bank and eventually home.

I pulled up to the bank and scurried in with plenty of time to spare. I didn’t think anything of it at the time, but there was an armored truck pulling away from the bank as I walked in. I hadn’t been waiting in the long, crooked line for even five minutes when they busted in. They were your average, stereotypical bank robbers. All three of them were dressed in black suits with black ski masks. They were toting duffel bags, waving their pistols around and screaming at the top of their lungs. One of the guys had a pistol that looked just like the one Harvey Keitel sported in “Reservoir Dogs,” but I really didn’t know much about guns.

One of the first things I noticed about the men, before I really noticed their appearance, was the fact that the guard in the right corner almost got the jump on them. They must not have cased the place.
very well, because he was right in plain sight of the masked thieves. They told us to get against the wall. We complied and the leader gave us some prepared speech about how we wouldn't get hurt if we didn't do anything stupid. The whole production was very generic. Once they disarmed the security guards and got the crowd under control, they started to put spray paint on the lenses of all the surveillance cameras. I noticed, however, that they had forgotten to spray the camera in the far left corner of the bank.

I could see these men were not professionals. I knew more about bank robberies than they did simply from all the movies I had seen. I knew they were too stupid to get away with it, and I didn't want to be stuck in the bank all night watching these blundering bandits debate about what they were going to do about the hundreds of police cars outside. I decided it was time to help out my new misguided friends.

I slowly walked up to the man with the Harvey Keitel gun, since he appeared to be the leader. I inched my way towards him so as not to get shot. I was about ten feet away from him when he noticed me. He quickly pointed his pistol at my chest.

"Don't move, motherfucker!" he threatened, gesturing for me to get back against the wall.

"I just thought you might want to know some very important information," I said, "like the fact that you guys forgot to spray the camera in the far left corner."

He nodded at me, and I could see the disgust in his eyes as he motioned for one of his cohorts to spray the neglected camera.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"As a matter of fact, yes there is," I said with a smirk. "You've put half of the people in the bank in a blind spot. You see?" I pointed. "All of those people over there can't be seen by any of you."

He gestured once again for one of his buddies to rectify the situation. "Thank you very much, sir," he said. "You've been a good little helper."


He turned to find one of the security guards reaching down to his ankle holster. "Don't even think about it!" he threatened. Both the size of his gun and the tone of his voice suggested that the guard should do as he was ordered. The guard stopped short of his ankle and raised his arms. My new friend ran over to him and took the piece away. The robber's choice of words made me laugh a little.

The thieves quickly went back about their business, but the poor man reached into his pocket, pulled out his keys and placed them in my hands. "Why are you doing this?" he asked, still smarting from the blow to his face.

I responded with another punch, this time to his stomach. He groaned and fell to the ground. All the while, the thieves couldn't stop laughing at my confrontation with the manager.

I walked back to my buddy and snatched the gun out of his hand. I kept on walking towards the vault. Surprisingly, the other men didn't shoot me. I think it was because they were laughing too hard to aim their guns accurately. I pointed the gun at one of the tellers and threw him the keys. "Open the vault, or you're dead," I stated sternly.

He opened the vault, and I motioned for him to back away. I walked into the vault to find myself surrounded by huge blocks of hundred dollar bills. The thieves might not have known how to take the place down, but they definitely knew when to pull the heist. It all made sense when I remembered the armored truck pulling away from the bank. They must have made a drop off right before my new friends walked through the door.

The gunless robber walked into the vault and said, "Good, it's all here." He threw the duffel bags down in front of me. "Put the money in these bags," he demanded, "and give me back my gun."

"No way," I laughed, "I kind of like this gun. I think I'll keep it."

"Listen buddy," he said, "this is my heist, and that's my gun, and you'd better give it back to me or I'll-"

"Or you'll what?" I interrupted. "Now you listen, I'm the one with the gun, so you're in no position to make demands. I'm a bank works? They were really starting to get on my nerves. All I wanted was to get out of that bank as quickly as possible, and these guys kept screwing with my plans. It seemed as if they were trying to hold me up. They seemed like they wanted to negotiate with half the cops in the city all night.

I figured I could've pulled this heist off a hell of a lot smoother than these guys, so I made a decision. It wasn't a very well advised decision, but desperate times call for desperate measures. I walked over to my new friend with a big grin.

He greeted me with a smile. "Hey, look, it's my new buddy," he said. "Say, do you have any other little tidbits to share with me?"

"Well, actually, I don't have anything specific to tell you, but," I paused, "could you excuse me for a few seconds?" I walked over to the manager of the bank, put my left hand on his shoulder, and jabbed him square in the jaw with my right. "Hand me the keys, you fucking cocksucker," I said with a sly grin. I had been waiting to use those words in a real life situation for quite some time.

The poor man reached into his pocket, pulled out his keys and placed them in my hands. "Why are you doing this?" he asked, still smarting from the blow to his face.

I responded with another punch, this time to his stomach. He groaned and fell to the ground. All the while, the thieves couldn't stop laughing at my confrontation with the manager.

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"No way," I laughed, "I kind of like this gun. I think I'll keep it."

"Listen buddy," he said, "this is my heist, and that's my gun, and you'd better give it back to me or I'll-"

"Or you'll what?" I interrupted. "Now you listen, I'm the one with the gun, so you're in no position to make demands. I'm
going to finish what you started and you’re going to let me. We’d be surrounded by cops if it weren’t for me, so you should be thankful that I’m willing to lend my services. Don’t worry about the money either, I’ll let you guys have your share after I deduct a small fee for all my hard work. Do you understand me?”

“All right,” he said, “I’ll agree to those terms, but you know what will happen if you screw me over, right?”

I nodded and he walked out of the vault. I started to pack the bags with the money. I swear, there must have been at least ten million dollars there. I was barely able to fit all of the money into the bags, but somehow I managed. I threw two of the bags through the door of the vault where they were quickly picked up by my new associates. I strapped the final bag over my shoulder and started out of the vault.

We quickly made our way out of the bank with the three heavy bags strapped on our shoulders. They led me to their car, we hopped in and took off. The driver looked back in bewilderment at the extra passenger in the car. “Who the hell is this?” he asked. “I don’t understand, is this a hostage or something?”

“Yeah,” said my robber friend, “that’s exactly what we have…a hostage.”

“What?” I asked in disgust. “I’m the reason you’re in this car heading away from the bank and not sitting negotiating with the police. You owe me. That guard would’ve killed you if I hadn’t told you he was going for the ankle holster.”

“Oh yeah, you saved my life,” he smiled. “And I do owe you. Here.” He ripped open one of the duffel bags and reached inside. He pulled out a small bundle of hundreds and threw them on my lap.

Before I could respond to his sarcastic offer, he snatched the gun from my hands. Before I even knew I had lost it, it was pressed against my forehead. The gun felt like it was digging into my brain. I felt the panic rush through my body. It started in my heart; a lump quickly emerged in my throat, and the fear slowly sent a tingling sensation down to my fingertips.

“I wouldn’t feel right if I didn’t thank you,” he said, “because we really couldn’t have pulled this off without you.”

The bullet went straight through my head and put a hole in the back window. The blood and brains rushed from the two holes in my skull and covered the interior of the car. They really didn’t pick a good place to kill me, since all of the blood made the car look suspicious. They opened the door and kicked my body out. I rolled for a good twenty feet as they sped away. They were caught thirty minutes later after a high-speed pursuit.

WHO HAD THE STRENGTH TO SEW ME IN
by Andrew McIlwraith

My playroom specter is here,
A teasing childhood shadow
whispering rhyme and riddle
and pulling fine hair from a fair arm.

Speech sprays violently
from some discreet corner of this place.
Battered or only pinched by it,
I choke on thought.

Forehead scar a hateful symbol
of careless question mark placement;
I’m stitched to cement walls with twine
and sweating with indetermination.

Who had the strength to sew me in,
The strength and the tender dexterity of grandmothers?

And is my will lost
in the cracked grey linoleum below me?
Or scattered like the toys
of a wailing child possessed by tantrum?
HEATWAVE
by Holly Dilatush-Guthrie

(a poem built upon five random words: whir, voice, cloud, blackberry, lick)

A whir of orgasmic bees hover near the blackberry bushes, humming,

voicing thrills of discovery. I taste those mellow berries in rhythmic licks

as a creamy cloud of sherbet dribbles downward and rivulets

of sweet desire anticipate your teasing, tantalizing tongue.

Monologue from I'LL TAKE THE FALL
a one act play
by Benjamin Derby

(RICH is meant to be a totally politically incorrect character. In this scene, RICH is trying to convince his friend, JIM, who is engaged, that he should not get married. JIM has just finished telling RICH that his entire view of love is really warped.)

RICH
It's not fucked up...it's just that for most people love is blind...I just choose to keep my eyes open. Women drive you nuts...they drive me nuts...they drive the entire fucking male population crazy. Marriage is an expensive ordeal...and a divorce is even worse. Why the hell are you willing to put yourself through that? Why put yourself through the petty shit women put you through? Get a fucking dog; they're cheaper and they're the same damn thing as a woman. I mean, you know what I say? Women are dogs. Women say men are dogs. Wrong. Men are pigs, yes, but women are dogs. I mean, look at them: Entirely faithful, waiting for you to come home, willing to do just about anything for you...Jim, go to a pet store. Ask the owner to show you a male dog and a bitch. Now I know they all look the same in the window, in their cages. They look very lonely and pathetic. But ask the pet store owner to take them out of the cages and this is what'll happen: He'll take the male dog out of the cage and the dog'll just look at you and struggle to get back into the cage. Then ask to see a bitch. The bitch will walk up to you and beg to be pet, stroked and loved. Sound familiar? I know what you're thinking: I'm insulting your woman. I'm not insulting your woman; I'm stating a true fact of life. All men want are what the Germans call 'guddentite' (pronounced "good-an-tight") and all women want is someone to cling to. Here's a scenario for you to think about: You come home from work, tired. Your dog comes running up to you to lick your face. You climb into bed and almost fall asleep...then the dog starts barking. You quiet it down by giving it a cookie and go back to bed. The dog then jumps on the bed, wanting to
play. You force the dog off the bed and say a forceful “No!” Then the dog just whimpers all night. Now here’s another story, not too different: You come home late to your faithful woman, who has stayed up late for you. All you want to do is go to bed and sleep. You get oh so comfortable in bed, and then she starts talking to you about a) something that you’d rather not talk about at one thirty in the morning or b) rather not talk about at all for that matter. When you finally make it clear to her that you don’t want to talk about anything that requires any brainwave activity, you get comfortable again. Then she strikes again with “Can we cuddle?” and wraps her arms around you. You tell her that you just want to get some sleep. You think that’s it? It’s all over? Wrong again. This just opens a new bag of fun. She then asks if anything is wrong with the relationship. Now, doesn’t that sound familiar? You want my advice, my friend? Pigs should just wallow in their own shit. Who ever saw a pig mate with a dog anyway?

A DESCRIPTION OF COMPROMISE
by Alana Smith

and in the twilight
there comes the darkness
the perfect mixture of strength and calm
the two intermingle
to soothe the soul
hush the world

stars that hang sleepily
a moon that fades in and out
the conquering sun
lays down its power to rest
I was a “child of the millennium,” born in the year 2000, a time when it was decided that all inequality would be wiped from the face of this great country. The idea of a “race” was never taught to me, nor the idea of differences. Every single one of the people I was in class with or I met was exactly the same as me, and I was told never to forget that. I was never allowed to read the books that I wanted to at school, or even write at all. The school sent home notes discouraging my parents from teaching me anything of the sort at home, saying it was giving me an “unfair advantage,” but my parents just threw the letters out and told me to write what I wanted. Everyone at school was nice, but outside in the world, people were getting angry—more angry every day. All of us, even the children, could feel the building tension; it was getting so thick one could reach out and touch it. Of course, Mom and Dad told me not to worry, and I tried not to, but maybe I should have. Maybe then I would have been prepared for what happened on the day of my tenth birthday, the day the government made that horrendous statement for the “equality of all mankind;” the day my world blew up.

I slowly rolled out of bed and sat up. Outside, the pounding surf echoed in my ears, echoed through the emptiness inside me. Rebekah, gone, alone and pregnant. My love, my life, on her own and unprotected in this jungle that was once L.A. My fear for her overwhelmed and disregarded the sorrow I felt, and I knew that I had to start out in search of her soon, before she reached the women’s group and was lost to me forever. That’s where she had gone, I was sure of it: back to the Raphielites where she could be safe, cared for, fed and well protected, back to a group that could give her all the things I tried to give her and couldn’t. I should have let her go weeks ago; I should have helped her go back to them as soon as she began to fear for her life with me, and the life of our unborn child. But no, I had sworn to her that I would feed them, I would protect them. We would live together as only a real family could. Foolishness; it had been such foolishness, and my own selfish greed. How could I live without her love now that I had made her the focus of my life? How could I let her walk out of my life when everything that I was, everything that I had, was her? Instead, I swore to protect her, to bring her food in plenty, to surround our child with love and devotion. I begged her not to leave, and she stayed. I knew I had to find her. I had to see the face of my child, to hold the small warm body in my arms and know that something in this world made a difference— that I had somehow made a difference.

Throwing my blankets aside, I crawled from beneath the crumbling boardwalk that was our home. We had found this little treasure along the surf by pure luck, abandoned for its neutrality, which was exactly what we needed. Long ago, within the first years of the revolt, the coastline of California had been unofficially declared a neutral zone for the masses. It became a place of meetings, a place of gatherings and a place where loners and stragglers had gone to be safe. Few, if any, communal wars had broken out here, and this became the place where each commune sent its informants to give and receive news travelling across the country. This was where I met Rebekah, both of us having been information traders for our communes, exchanging food, news, supplies, sexual favors and anything else of value between the sections of the city. This is where I had first seen her flashing brown eyes, her long braided blond hair, where I had first known what it was to love a person without needing them to survive. We had talked, first about what we had come for, then about nothing and everything in the world. As the age old story goes, I fell in love. Rebekah became my whole world; my days became merely passing time until I could be in her arms again and feel her loving body pressed against mine. The danger of our devotion to one another was acknowledged by us both, and yet the power of our emotions let there be no other way. The communal rules of the city were very clear. Men and women were different in make and disposition. Men’s communes and women’s communes both allowed no permanent or affectionate contact between the two. For the men, women were made purely for sexual pleasure, either to be traded for or taken by force if the situation allowed. For women, men were purely for reproductive purposes and served no lasting need. Living in the comprehension of these rules, Rebekah and I understood that to survive, our love must be kept a secret. We spent hours lying on our backs, gazing at the stars and dreaming of a life together in safety, our love for each other boldly displayed. We dreamed of a life of balanced, clearly understood and
accepted inequality among us all, for we had come to love one another for the differences we simply could not-and did not- want to hide.

I knew by the clock on my dresser that it was seventeen minutes after one when my mother tore me from my bed that misbegotten night. My eyes bleary, I stood still in front of my bed as my mother dressed me and talked in a rushed, panicked voice. She kept telling me not to be scared, to be very quiet, for we must leave tonight, right now and I mustn’t cry or complain, she would explain it all later.

"Susan! Come down right away!" called my father’s voice from downstairs. There was a sound to it I didn’t like. It was the same sound that had been on the edge of his voice for several weeks, and had now overtaken it entirely. I had never heard my father truly frightened before, and for a ten year old, there is nothing more terrifying.

I could hear the shouting outside, and the sound of things breaking. My mother’s eyes flashed to my window as she scooped me up. Racing down the stairs, she nearly stumbled, but caught herself as a scream escaped her throat.

"David! David, my water broke! Oh God, what do I do?" My mother fell to her knees and released me slowly from her arms. My father was at her side in an instant, carrying her towards their bedroom.

"Shh, honey, it’ll be all right," my father said in a strained, soothing tone. "I promise, it’ll be all right." Clinging to my father’s leg, I followed them into the bedroom, where he lay my mother down. It was then that the front door shattered and the sound of angry voices entered our home.

Our front door had been beautiful, made of stained glass and depicting a scene from the Bible. It showed a pair of nude people (which had delighted me to no end as a child), a man and a woman, sitting in a garden field with all kinds of flowers and fruits. I remember that the differences we simply could not-and did not- want to hide.

I was at her side in an instant, carrying her towards our home. The front door had been beautiful, made of stained glass and depicting a scene from the Bible. It showed a pair of nude people (which had delighted me to no end as a child), a man and a woman, sitting in a garden field with all kinds of flowers and fruits. I remember that the differences we simply could not-and did not- want to hide.

When the front door broke, my parents both froze. Just for an instant, I remember thinking how it looked like something you’d see on the Saturday morning cartoons. In a heartbeat, my father was on his feet and talked in a rushed, panicked voice. He kept telling me not to be scared, to be very quiet, for we must leave tonight, right now and I mustn’t cry or complain, she would explain it all later.

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"Son, I want you to listen very closely to me," he said as his voice began to crack. "I want you to go down to the garage, out the door and into the woodshed behind it. I want you to stay there until I come and get you. Do not leave unless I come and get you." His grip on my shoulders tightened, and he brought me closer to him. "Do you understand, Issac? Do not leave, no matter what happens. Please do this for me son, do this for your mother and I." I nodded my head, my heart hammering in my chest. The sounds from downstairs, the yelling and the sound of things shattering had reached the living room. My father drew me to him and hugged me so tightly I thought my ribs would break.

"Now go son, and hurry." My mother was writhing on the bed, barely supressing screams that were as much out of fear as pain.

I turned and rushed down the stairs. I could see the flicker of a torch from the living room doorway that led to the kitchen. Holding my breath, I ran past the door and into the back of our kitchen which led to the stairs to the garage. Out and into the cool air, the door slammed behind me in time for me to hear the voices rising in my wake.

"That was from the stairs! Go, you damn fool, find out what’s upstairs. Fuckin’ rich man gonna die tonight!"

There was the shuffle of feet, the scramble up the stairs, and then I was outside. The woodshed was cold, the dust and wood chips hard beneath my socked feet. I lay in the corner, my breath coming in gasps, listening to the screams that came from my parents’ bedroom. My father died quickly; I heard the gunshot. My mother’s screams went well into the night, dying shortly before they began to burn my house. A while after the burning had begun, and after I heard the mob move off, I passed out. The dreams I had that night were unlike any other I’ve had, filled with sound and light, vivid in their pictures even today, eleven years later. I dreamt of Dante Alegari, I dreamt of the levels of hell and how I wished I were that lucky. I dreamt of the punishment I would receive for my cowardice when I was at last removed from this horror.

I awoke that morning to the smell of burnt wood, a smell of undirected nostalgia from somewhere in my childhood. Sick to my stomach with fear, I crept slowly from the woodshed and gazed on what was once my house. The entire structure had not been destroyed, but the house was gutted. Glass lay all over the ground, and smoke still leaked from the blackened window frames. My mind completely blank, I walked slowly out from behind the house and toward the small playground my father had built for me years ago. My swingset was completely intact, and I sat on the swing, my feet scuffing the sand below them, and let my mind disappear.

How long I was sitting there I don’t know, but the voices were very close by the time I bothered to notice them. The sound of men talking and laughing was coming from the front of what used to be my house. I knew I should run, or at least try to hide, but nothing in me was working. They were behind the house, just yards from me, when I lifted my
head to see who at last would remove me from this pain. Upon my move­ment, the party, which consisted of about five men, stopped and stared at me for a moment. Then a loud and racous voice broke from the one in front, a voice half surprised and half laughing.

“Well boys! What do we have here?” He came forward with great, powerful strides, the other men lingering behind. He turned and laughed at them. “Come now gentlemen, after the shit we went through last night, I can’t believe you won’t approach a little boy, no matter how dangerous he appears!” With another laugh, he turned and walked up to me.

He was a big man, far larger than my father, with wide shoulders and a large frame. His hair was a dirty red, as was the bushy beard that covered most of his face. Even in my fear I thought of Paul Bunyan and almost smiled as the huge man approached me.

I cringed for the blow, my eyes closed tight, my body tense, and nearly peed my pants when instead of a hard fist, I was assulted my a loud disbelieving laugh. I opened my eyes and looked up to the large face looming above me. A smile played on his lips and twinkled in his blue eyes. Getting down on one knee, he stuck his hand out to me, big and hard and calloused.

“Name’s Danny McGarthy, and who might you be little man?”

I just stared at him for a moment, and felt the shame overtake me as tears welled in my eyes.

“Oh son, take it easy,” he said as the smile melted from his face and was replaced by a look of sympathy. “Is this your house?” he asked, gesturing over his shoulder to the burned wreck. I nodded, my head down, tears rolling down my cheeks.

One of the men behind him called out, “Ain’t that the Farworthy house?”

“You the little Farworthy boy?” Danny asked, his face confused. I nodded, and he put his finger under my chin, lifting my face. “And what’s your name, son?”

“Issac, Issac Farworthy,” I said, looking in fear and awe into his big blue eyes.

“And your daddy’s the one who owns Farworthy Incorporated?” I nodded again and he shook his head. “Shit son, why didn’t you and your family take off outta here with the rest of the rich folks? Go to Australia or Europe? Your mom and dad had to know what was going on.”

“I, I don’t kno—, my mom, she was gonna have, I mean, she was pregnant and—” I stammered. “But it wasn’t her fault, I mean, she couldn’t help it and, my dad said it was too dangerous and—”
NO SUBSTITUTIONS
by Marion E. Green

(There is a counter center stage and at the end of the counter on the left is a deli cooler. Stage right has a large blackboard sign stating “Today’s Special: Ham and American Cheese on Rye, New England Clam Chowder, medium Coke, $4.95. In large letters NO SUBSTITUTIONS. A CLERK is behind the counter and a CUSTOMER is in front of the counter.)

CUSTOMER
I have a list in my pocketbook...here...somewhere. Here it is...No...That’s not it...I can’t find it...Oh, well. I want five takeouts...all the special. I’m glad you have the same specials on the same day of the week, otherwise it would throw our department into total chaos...not that it isn’t already. But that’s another story.

You’re new here, aren’t you? Well, I’m not surprised... the other clerk was a real bitch, if you know what I mean. She was so insistent on specials being exact and all that. Just like my boss. His rules are NOT made to be broken. Yeah right...give me a break. But, I suppose that’s an authority thing, if you know what I mean.

On the first order, instead of medium Coke, Shelly will have milk. She’s going to have another baby and she really should have milk instead of Coke. She almost died having the last baby and now she’s having another one. But, that’s another...Wait, where are you going?

(The CLERK goes off stage and returns with her BOSS, who just throws his arms up and shakes his head yes and leaves.)

Oh, you don’t have to ask him, he doesn’t mind substitutions at all.

On the second order, instead of American cheese, make that Swiss because Harriette really hates your American cheese. The deli down the street has much better American cheese. Maybe you could find out where they get their cheese from...and order from that place...because to be perfectly honest your cheeses...and also cold cuts aren’t the greatest...but prices are o.k.

On the next order, instead of New England Clam Chowder, make it chicken noodle. Alice gets the hives when she eats seafood. She just puffs right up. Now, you wouldn’t want her death on your hands. Of course, you wouldn’t, dear.

On the next order, roast beef instead of ham. Ida’s Jewish, can’t eat ham. Her husband is a gentile...so maybe she can eat ham...but it’s better to be safe than sorry...you don’t mind making a substitution for Ida, now do you dear?...Of course not.

(Several other CUSTOMERS have been coming in and the line is getting longer and longer.)

Now my order, I want the special exactly as it is...except instead of ham and cheese...turkey and lettuce...on a hard roll...instead of rye...and...instead of a medium Coke...a large iced tea...with lemon, of course...and instead of soup...a slice of apple pie...and could you put a scoop of vanilla ice cream in a separate container?...wouldn’t want that pie to get soggy.

(The CUSTOMER pays for the orders and starts to leave.)

I’ll see you tomorrow, dearie.

(Black.)
HAIKU
by T.J.M.

The leaves are restless
shifting in the late fall wind
with every footstep.

HAIKU
by Anthony Mazzorana Jr.

Lake Ontario
swims softly within herself
and warns of winter.

HAIKU #1
by Jill Chmelko

Winter whispers a
calm reminder to the lone
pine in the distance.

SENRYU #1
by Jill Chmelko

She surrendered the seed
she held tightly to the
depths of the hard earth.

(WHAT IS BECOMING)
USUAL CONVERSATION
by Jennifer Eighmey

The deal was that you allow yourself
to reason beyond all of the misconceptions,
while I spoke with such exaustion of things
you believe exist beyond control.
There is explanation for this frustration:
I am on the road leading past you,
each of my steps existing for painful dilemmas
not extinguished because of ignorance.
Bristles mark the way you disregard
my resistance of your materialism.

Why is it naive for me to say, at a table full of peers,
that I was created to do something
more than merely vegetate and attend lecture?
That I need to run from this protection and
immerse myself in the actions
of eliminating these images that I’ve so far
only learned in bits and pieces
exist beyond this college town of bars and grocery stores?

Basically, what I was told at dinner tonight was
not to worry so much about these things,
that we exist for ourselves only.
After all of the straining and absolute sincerity
that poured from me tonight
we rose to clear our plates
just as on every previous Thursday and
began mental preparation for the next day’s schedule.
The difference for me was that
my food didn’t sit right and I only felt compelled
to prepare for tomorrow’s dinner conversation.
Unwrap the wax paper, find a spoon, spark the lighter and watch my life boil away in tiny brown bubbles. The needle is sharp and gives me what I need, the slack from the tourniquet feels natural, like a third arm or a crutch. The shattered mirror on the wall presents me with my ghost. My skin is stretched taut across my skeleton, my veins are collapsed from being punctured again and again, in sickness and in health. I look like one of those Ethiopian kids who can hide your conscience for only eight cents a day; but I’m not an Ethiopian, I’m not that lucky. I’m a junkie.

I’m a desperate junkie, afraid of the millenium, living in my memories of a time when this tenement was the center of a scene without a center. A time when my name was Poet and I walked with Jesus. A time when this mirror was whole. A time not long ago, but a life away.

I came to New York to discover myself; I found St. Mark’s instead. When Jesus and I came here, his name was Joseph and mine was Peter. We came to New York because college was a big fucking lie, and Greyhound was having a two for one sale on tickets that week.

Our first week was spent in a shabby motel in Queens that hadn’t had a name since the paint on the sign had faded beyond recognition. We were philosophers then. We would stay up drinking cheap vodka and subject everything to the tenacious width of our gaping minds. Religion, our peers, culture, nothing was safe from our drunken rants. When the vodka started to taste like water, I would retreat to the bed and pour forth grand poetry while Jesus did charcoal sketches of a future past.

That first week was a waking dream; it was the lifestyle we had come looking for. Our minds were full of the collective unconsciousness that real thought dwells in. We really thought everything was going to be okay; it was as if we expected the ghosts of Kerouac and Ginsberg to come knocking and sweep us into the world which we were so covertly desperate for. We didn’t know that people who go searching for ghosts often become them.

Money started to get thin and we realized we were going to have to get jobs and find a more permanent place to live. After some reality-altering job hunting, I found a job washing dishes at Di’Mico’s Restaurant on Gulliver Street in Brooklyn. Papa Di’Mico was a gluttonously large Italian in his late fifties who recognized me for the romantic dolt that I was and took some pity on me. “I give you a place to live, eh?” was the first thing he said after hiring me. He talked with his entire body, and from far off would have resembled a really bad mime. He owned the apartments behind the restaurant and was willing to rent me on the condition that I never bring any whores up there. “I have one rule,” he said. “No whores, eh?” Everything he said sounded like a question because of the “eh” he always ended with. “They’re filthy and no good, liars all of them, eh?” I told him I had no money for whores and very little for the apartment. “Don’t a worry,” he said, putting his beefy arm around me like I was a lodge brother, “I take a little bit out of your paycheck each week, that way you get most of the rent paid right away.” I told him that would be fine and asked if I was allowed to have a roommate. He replied with a raised eyebrow. “You got a wife? A girlfriend, eh?” I told him about Jesus and he gave me a funny look. “You a fag, eh?” I acted shocked and vehemently denied the question, which seemed to satisfy him. “Fine,” he said. “You tell your friend no whores either, capeech?” I agreed and it was all set. I was to start the next day at ten in the morning, and I could move in after my shift was over at five.

I could smell pot coming from our room when I got back to the motel. I hoped this meant that Jesus had found a job and was celebrating with a few bowls, but I was not surprised when he told me otherwise. “I went to six coffee shops, three restaurants, and two bookstores. Nobody even gave me a second look.” That made him sound pathetic, and I snapped, “Maybe if you clean yourself up a bit you could get a fucking job.” Jesus had shoulder length brown hair and a thick beard to match. This, along with his aquiline nose, made him look much like a shaggy eagle, except eagles are strong and proud. Jesus was thin and gaunt. The moonlight through the window made him look like a man dying of AIDS.
Jesus just turned back to his pipe; the flame from the lighter made the shadows dance on his face like tiny demons. I apologized and took a hit. Three more made me feel pretty good so I apologized again and told him it was okay because I had found a job and an apartment. This raised morale a bit and we toasted our future luck with the rest of the vodka. I went to bed in a drastically altered state and had a strange dream in which my veins glowed and I recited poetry to a body of mist while Jesus was being chased by a gang of albinos wearing masks.

The next day went smoothly. Dishwashing is an easy job and I am the quiet type, so it went off without a hitch. Moving in was easy because we only had our bags and a couple of blankets that Jesus had picked up at the Salvation Army while I was at work. That night we ate leftovers that Papa Oi’Mico had given me. “Just until you get a few paychecks under your belt, eh?” he told me as he stuffed the styrofoam package in my arms with a wink. After dinner we smoked what was left of the marijuana Jesus had brought. Jesus promised to look for a job while I was at work tomorrow.

And so life went; New York became routine. Every day I went to work and Jesus went job-hunting. Every night I cam home with leftovers to find Jesus lying in bed, smoking a cigarette, still unemployed, but always with something to ensure that we would not be sober that night. At first it was a bottle of vodka or a dimebag of weed. Soon he began to bring home new things: Benzedrine, mescaline; he said he was bored with the weed high. One day he won fifty dollars on a lottery scratch-off; we had ‘shrooms on our pizza that night. We were almost never sober. I had long forgotten why we came to New York, why we were just there. Jesus just turned back to his pipe; the flame from the lighter made the shadows dance on his face like tiny demons. I apologized and took a hit. Three more made me feel pretty good so I apologized again and told him it was okay because I had found a job and an apartment. This raised morale a bit and we toasted our future luck with the rest of the vodka. I went to bed in a drastically altered state and had a strange dream in which my veins glowed and I recited poetry to a body of mist while Jesus was being chased by a gang of albinos wearing masks.

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According to Jesus, he had met a street punk named Nothing in his quest for mescaline that day. He said Nothing had taken a liking to him because his long hair and brown beard made him look like Jesus, so that’s what he called him.

“I had to interrupt, “So you’re Jesus now, huh?”

He thought for a second before responding. “Yeah, I guess, but only to Nothing. I kind of like it though. Anyway, Nothing told me about a punk show tonight at some club called the Monastery over in St. Mark’s. He said he can get us in free. I think we should go.” He stared at me with those eager eyes, hungry, threatening to pull me back into his frantic brain again, and for the second time in the same day, he made sense.

We popped the mescaline tablets before catching the subway to St. Mark’s. Watching the world fly past from a subway window is a unique experience on a mescaline high. Jesus even looked slightly alive, like a skeleton on speed.

The St. Mark’s district was not the best area of New York; it was one of those places that feels inherently bad, but makes you question your better instincts by drawing you back again and again. St. Mark’s thrives on the filth of human nature and is therefore one of the more interesting parts of New York.

The subway opened up and St. Mark’s spread out before us. It was late and the streets looked like a post-apocalyptic wonderland slimed with sleaze. The wind picked up and garbage flapped around like entrails in a brisk wind. Whores and all manner of vermin passed us by. Jesus looked at me and smiled. It struck me that he looked like he belonged in this warped Araby, and that I didn’t feel at all out of place.

I heard the Monastery three blocks before I saw it. It was a two story building painted black and plastered with all manner of graffiti and concert flyers. The people hanging outside looked like they had been warped in from a Sex Pistols concert. They didn’t have hair, they had plumage. Red, green, purple, spiked out in every direction; they looked like angry peacocks.

I was about to ask Jesus which one of these fallen angels was Nothing when a slurred yell cut me off. “Jesus, Jesus, my fucking savior.” I followed the voice back to a short punk playfully accosting Jesus. Nothing
was short, about five feet four inches, with a pale complexion that made him look like a little boy who had been kept in a dark room all his life. He had a black mohawk, cropped short and the word “UNITY” tattooed on the side of his head. Like all the other punks, Nothing wore black pants and black Doc Martens with white laces. His coat was a black, hooded, zipper sweatshirt littered with patches and safety pins.

Nothing laughed when Jesus introduced me. “Peter,” he shrieked, “your name can’t be Peter.” I asked him why and he looked at me like I was just asked what two plus two was. “It just can’t. My name is Nothing. Your friend Joseph is Jesus. You need a street name.”

He told me not to worry, I would have one soon enough, and he led us to an alley behind the club. Neither Jesus or I knew it at the time, but we were about to find existence.

The alley reeked of stale beer, stale urine, and bad intentions. It smelled like St. Mark’s. One of the larger punks had a woman bent over a garbage can. His jacket had a large American flag on the back emblazoned over with a dollar sign and a cross. The word “Sellvation” was embroidered underneath the flag, with the “S” cleverly disguised as a dollar sign. He was sweating terribly and he grunted as his nostrils flared out with every depreciating thrust. The woman’s leather skirt was hiked up around her waist, and she was exceptionally beautiful, even with her face shoved in a pile of garbage. Her skin was lily white and as delicate as a fragile wing. Her white blouse and shimmering silver hair billowed out with every violent jerk of the man’s pelvis. She screamed out Jesus’ name in desperation and I didn’t know whether to laugh at the irony or cry at the hope within.

The whole scene made me feel ill. I asked Jesus what the fuck we were doing in this alley. He told me just to wait because he had a surprise for me. Finally we stopped and Nothing pulled out two needles and a small bag from his coat, his face contorted into a seductively trashy grin. Jesus grabbed me with those mad eyes. “I got us some heroin,” he said.

It occurred to me that I had no idea what I was going to do once I reached Jesus. I was certainly in no condition to fight and wouldn’t have been able to help much even if I was sober. I was as a frail as Jesus. I didn’t feel quite as helpless when I saw Nothing and a few of his comrades running to the defense of their newly-dubbed messiah. I broke into a clumsy, jerky run of a man on heroin and for a brief moment, my body didn’t exist. My first thought was that if I could feel like this all the time, the world would be a wonderful place. Nothing eased me back against the wall; Jesus looked at me and saw that it was good.

I don’t know how long I stayed in the alley. When I became aware of my surroundings Jesus and Nothing were gone, the music from the Monastery still pounding. I felt like I was floating, and I wanted to explore the world. Everything fascinated me, the garbage of the alley fascinated me, the dead girl in the leather skirt looked like a young angel to me. I felt curious and wise at the same time. Like a grand poet I started speaking my thoughts aloud, dictating my poem to the brewing subconsciousness in the underbelly of St. Mark’s.

The music pulled me from the filth into the club, which was stuffed full. It was like some sort of demented petting zoo, full of angry peacocks and leather girls. The place was blissful to me, people and broken glass everywhere. I continued my poem, pierced faces and painted hearts peering back at me, in time with the urgent music. The music infused me, fed my poetry and sent me flying. The band was playing an old Operation Ivy song. The lyrics are still etched in my memory to this day:

“I always looked up to the ones who walked away. Choosing themselves over preset ways of looking at a future that had no room for the questions they lived for. Always knew I could never walk away myself. My self-worth was beyond any help. And I didn’t care to test it against the rejection I had seen before.

But those I loved so much, they underwent this change.

Like junkies running dry, they’re working forty hours, they got caught up in the game. Like junkies running dry, the vulnerability. Like junkies running dry, they’re always there on time. Like junkies running dry, we’re never statisfied like junkies running dry.”

The sight of Jesus getting beat by six large lunks with bold black X’s tattooed on their hands wrested my mind from the lyrics. Trying to get to Jesus was like swimming through a sea of free floating cinderblocks. I was so high I could barely stay on my feet. It occurred to me that I had no idea what I was going to do once I reached Jesus. I was certainly in no condition to fight and wouldn’t have been able to help much even if I was sober. I was as a frail as Jesus. I didn’t feel quite as helpless when I saw Nothing and a few of his comrades running to the defense of their newly-dubbed messiah. I broke into a clumsy, jerky run of a man on heroin and tried to
drag Jesus out. All the effort got me was a chain to the head.

I woke up next to Jesus on the damp floor of an abandoned tenement. He was unconscious; his chest and arms were covered with cuts and bruises and his face looked like Sylvester Stallone’s at the end of Rocky II. I tried to wake him, but he was cold. I heard footsteps behind me, then a voice. “Leave him alone, Poet. It’ll be a while before he gets up after the beating he took.” I turned and saw Nothing. His tough, street punk persona didn’t allow him room for pain.

“What did you call me?” I asked. I thought I heard him call me Poet, but no one had ever called me that before.

“I called you Poet,” he said. “That’s your street name now because you were moaning poetry all last night. Now let’s go get some food.”

So now my name was Poet. I didn’t think about it at the time, but it really stuck. No one has called me Peter since that day.

We returned to find Jesus awake and pacing the room like an interrogator. “Where the hell have you guys been?” he asked. “It’s a good thing you came back now. I was just about to leave to get some food. I’m starving.” I tossed him half the sub we had saved for him and he paced and ate like some kind of paranoid feline. He was in remarkably high spirits for a man who had just been beaten into a purple mess; he seemed more alive than he had been in months. He went on and on about heroin.

“We’ve got to get more heroin. I felt like a fucking god last night.” His eyes flashed with excitement, a paradox to the weariness of his face.

“Peter,” he spoke my name for the last time. “Didn’t that stuff make you feel great?” I smiled at his excitement.

“My name is Poet now, Jesus.” He gave me a quizzical look, “Poet, Poet.” He repeated my name over and over, “I like it.”

A look of remembrance came over his face and he asked Nothing about getting beat again. I echoed his curiosity, “Yeah, what the fuck was that all about?” Nothing told us that they were straight edge punks and they beat on Jesus because his hair was long and his brown beard made him look like a hippie.

“St. Mark’s punks hate hippies,” he explained. I suggested that maybe Jesus should cut his hair and shave so he wouldn’t have to worry about getting beat again.

“Hell no,” he leered, “I wouldn’t do it to get a job and I won’t do it now.”

Get a job. Those three words reminded me that I was supposed to have been at work that morning. I was about seven hours late. I cursed and told Nothing and Jesus that I had to get back to Brooklyn. Jesus said he was going to get some heroin and to meet him at the Monastery that night.

The subway ride back was a nervous one, I didn’t want to lose my job because if I lost my job, my cash flow and apartment went with it.

I found Papa Di’Maco in the back room of the restaurant, checking the books. When he saw me, his face turned bright red and his breathing grew heavy. He looked suspiciously like an obscenely large tomato with a mustache.

“Where the fuck have you been?” he bellowed. “You just decide not to show up to work today, you loser?” I tried to explain that I had been beaten up and was unconscious for most of the day, but he was not in any mood to listen to me. He fired me and said he wanted me out of the apartment that night or I would spend another day unconscious.

That was the last thing I wanted, so I left to pack up our stuff. That was an easy task, since all we had between us were some clothes, a few blankets, and my journal. I was about to leave when an idea struck me. I took twenty bucks from our stash and went off to find a whore, just to spite that fat bastard.

The whore tried to get more money out of me. She said she would do anything I wanted. I asked her if she had any heroin. When she said no, I kicked her out and left to catch the subway back to St. Mark’s. I knew what I wanted, I didn’t know that I was on my way home.

St. Mark’s seemed much less vile upon my second visit; I even felt a shudder of relief as the streets rose steadily from the mouth of the subway, engulfing one of their own. I had a short walk from the subway to the Monastery, which was on the corner of 99th and Martyr. It was early, so the club was virtually empty inside and out. I went around to the back alley to see if Jesus was there. All I found was the body of the girl we had seen being raped the night before. Anything of even remote value that she may have been wearing was long gone by now, and her face was being gnawed slowly away, she still emanated a pale beauty, and a small part of me mourned for the world.

I left the alley to check the abandoned tenement where we had slept the night before. The punks called it the Warehouse for some reason I could never discern. The Warehouse looked like most buildings in St. Mark’s, splattered with graffiti, old flyers and posters, and just generally dilapidated and disgusting. I opened the front door to the staircase staring up at me, hearing voices from the second floor, I headed up.

The second floor of the Warehouse is a huge open area about fifty by one hundred feet. It had once been divided into separate apartments by walls, but those had been knocked down ages ago, as had most other clues that would suggest that this junkie gymnasium had once housed apartments. The only thing left from those far off days was a large mirror framed in a gilded faux gold that was hanging at the far end of the room, serving
as a beacon to its star-crossed subjects.

The second floor was an orgy of people, drugs, hopes, dreams and failures. The large punk with the $ellvation jacket was there, the singer and guitarist from the band who had played the Monastery the night before. Everyone was there, white, black, female, male, users and pushers. The second floor of the Warehouse was a world unto itself. The room was cramped, but people still managed to segregate themselves. The pushers stayed in one corner, the whores in another. A small section against the wall was dubbed “the nursery;” this is where the youngest and newest of the flock stood. One kid in the nursery caught my eye right away; he stuck out like an X. He had on baggy jeans, Airwalk sneakers, and a Nirvana shirt. The sides of his head were shaved and he kept the top pulled back into a ponytail that fell to the base of his neck. He was a white male somewhere between the ages of 15 and 21. He looked lost, like he had no idea of who or where he was.

Finally, I saw Jesus. He was sitting on a freestanding concrete staircase of three steps, talking to Nothing. The gilded mirror hung directly behind him, and I could see the entire congregation reflected as I approached him.

The staircase was the throne of the second floor; it was the gathering place of the Elders, the old school punks who had managed to survive St. Mark’s. Nothing was an Elder- he had been at St. Mark’s since ’91. Nothing had taken a strong liking to Jesus, so we got to hang out by the stairs, quite an honor for a couple of newbies like us.

Jesus gave me a smile when he saw our bags under my arm. “Got fired, huh?” He didn’t seem upset in the least.

“Yeah,” I answered. “And kicked out of the apartment.”

Jesus said that it was okay because Nothing was going to let us sleep on the third floor where he stayed with his friends. I thanked Nothing for letting us crash; that was one worry out of the way. He responded with another welcoming wink and introduced me to his friends.

These were the Elders, and they were all junkies. They didn’t remember ever being anything else. They were classic street punks, black boots, black or tartan pants, piercings filled with safety pins, and hair in every offensively bright color imaginable. Their names echoed their features. They were called Void, Wreckage, Stunt, Tread, and a frighteningly sickly one named Patch. I asked Nothing what was wrong with Patch, and again he looked at me like I had just asked him what two plus two was. “He hasn’t had a hit in days,” he patiently responded. “He’s been on H for years now and the withdrawl is making him sick.”

I must have looked unnerved because Jesus patted me on the shoulder and said “C’mom, I know what will make you feel better.”

I followed him and Nothing up to the third floor. Nothing took out a needle and began to sharpen it on the rough side of a matchbox. I watched him and waited like a child on Christmas Eve. I don’t remember the feeling of that second fix. Heroin is like sex that way; you always remember the first time, the rest just blurs together.
PROVING OUR EXISTENCE
by Michelle Carini
(for A.)

tiny purple blotches
burst through the
paste of my skin

lingering marks
perfectly shaped
lining my arm
lingering on my hip
caressing my leg

shapes that appeared
strangely formed to me
at first
now I slowly realize

placing my palm
firmly down
over them

I can see
the outline
of your
hand.

STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER
by Erin McCarthy

I'm running for president
I see the plight of the cynical
I see the slow asphyxiation of the apathetic;
their cries for the sunshine and the chipmunks,
the moondrops and the chain linked fences
to cut through the gray of their
perpetual hindsight
and lead them to greener pastures
their cries for "honesty in leadership"
manna from heaven
packed neatly
into microwave dinners.

So I'm running for president.
Give me a button, a clipboard, and a tie,
and I'm off.
Seeking Truth,
Seeking Truth
Seeking...Votes.

Votes to feed, to satiate
the beast of progression,
of transgression.
A fence rider am I,
riding that fence of mediation
walking that line of inaction
avoiding reaction
causing retro-action
and with retrospection
taking the gratification
of today
as recompense
for the selling
of tomorrow.
I don’t want to digress,
I want to regress.
Take off the layers.
Strip me clean...
'Cause I'm running for president.
And I'll see your dreams in your eyes
and call them mine
use your fears to shepherd you.
And I'll see your faces melt together
into platforms and factions.

And I will call you America
And I will call you my people.

I will give you war as unifier
and peace as rhetoric.

BILL

So...(beat) I hope you appreciate this suicide mission I'm on here.
Not that I have a death wish or anything, but I was—am pretty much
written into this situation, literally. And this is only a monologue. A mono-
logue only lasts about, what, five minutes or something like that? Probably
less. Not nearly a lifetime. And of course, when the monologue ends, I'm
dead. Yup, dead. That's it. I'm nothing more than an incarnation of the
author. I am only a character. My purpose could be for a few bullshit
reasons. Maybe to try and make a "point," which of course is overstated,
useless and cliche. To give some lousy actor a job acting lousy in some
overbudgeted movie, or maybe so the author can go to a party after a
reading of this, after I'm dead of course, slurp down a few Tom Collins,
and get some insincere praise, using as much modesty as he feels appropriate.
And then try his ass off to get laid. My life, however, is insignificant and
fucking worthless. I don't even have a real personality. Just the few tidbits
of life you can drag out of this rant. No dad, no mom, no home or memo-
ries, or even anybody to talk to. A damn monologue, not even a short
scene. I don't get to be Romeo or be a surly fuckin' real estate salesman.
The monologue, the loneliest of all writings. (getting sad, long pause, he
starts to break down) Shit man, I don't wanna die. I know I don't really
deserve this? What can I do to stop it? I'm sorry, Mr. Playwright, sir! I'm
sorry. Why do you have to use me to get out your frustrations? (beat) And
what's going to happen to me? Will I even know when it's over? (beat,
getting angry) And by the way, thank you very much for sitting there
watching my imminent end! Just waiting for my death! (clapping loud and
hard, speaking in an English accent) 'Yeah! Woo hoo, nice life! I had crappy
seats and the theater was a bit hot, but watching you die was a joy! (claps
as hard as possible) Yeah! Jolly good show!' I guess I shouldn't even care,
right? Happy I was given life at all. But a life that's not even mine. All
written, predetermined. Born one late night at a keyboard as Ramen
noodles were spilled all over the outline that is my life. Came to being...
because there was nothing on TV. Damnit! You know what? That's all I, I or this thing on stage, guesses. Shit. (trying to accept it) Well, thanks for listening. Thank you, maybe I'll be back someday. Ok, well, (beat) yup, good- (beat) good-bye. (begins clapping softly as lights go down, and cries.)
TO CHRISTINA AND RASHEDA:

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HELP - GOOD LUCK
IN YOUR FUTURE ENDEAVORS

TO ERIN, KATHY, DEBBIE, LEIGH AND SARA:

THANK YOU AND GOOD LUCK NEXT YEAR - SEND
ME A COPY IN BOSTON!

WELL, IT'S BEEN EDUCATIONAL, KIDS, BUT.....

I

AM

OUTTA

HERE!!!!!!

-jill